United Nations S/PV.5937

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5937th meeting

Friday, 18 July 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Bui The Giang	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Ms. Li Xinyan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Trambajolo
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Panama	Ms. Jácome
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994

Identical letters dated 13 June 2008 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (S/2008/436)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994

Identical letters dated 13 June 2008 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council (S/2008/436)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Rwanda in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Nsengimana (Rwanda) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/467, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations.

Members also have before them document S/2008/436, which contains the text of identical letters dated 13 June 2008 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council, transmitting a letter dated 6 June 2008 from the President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1824 (2008).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council will remain seized of the matter.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

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President:	Mr. Bui The Giang	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Panama	Mr. De Vengoechea
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

Letter dated 22 November 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/920)

Report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/454)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 22 November 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/920)

Report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/454)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of India, Japan and Nepal in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Acharya (Nepal) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal and head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/454).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal and head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Martin: On 28 May, six days after I last briefed the Council, Nepal's newly elected Constituent Assembly held its first meeting. It voted to implement a federal democratic republic, and within the allotted period the former king left the palace, without incident, to remain peacefully in Nepal.

Tomorrow the Assembly is scheduled to elect Nepal's first president and to proceed to name a prime minister, who will form a new government. In his 12 May report (S/2008/313), the Secretary-General had said that he did not anticipate a further extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), but that once the government was formed, I, as his Special Representative, together with the Resident Coordinator, would enter into discussions with it regarding whatever assistance it may request from the United Nations for the completion and consolidation of the peace process and for the long-term development of Nepal. Obviously, discussion with a new government has not been able to take place, but in the meantime the Council has before it a request based on a consensus among the main parties for an extension of the mandate of UNMIN. The clarification of that request sought by the Secretary-General has now been received through the Permanent Representative of Nepal.

Allow me to begin by summarizing the outcome and the unfinished business of the negotiations that have delayed the formation of a new government. The interim constitution provided for the decision regarding a republic to be made by the first meeting of the Assembly, but it was silent on arrangements for the functions of head of State during the drafting of a new constitution. It provided for a prime minister to be selected by political consensus or, failing that, by a two-thirds majority and, similarly, to be subject to removal by a two-thirds majority vote. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN (M)), which had campaigned for its own leader to become executive president and whose members constitute over one-third of the Assembly, was persuaded in the post-election negotiations to agree to the amendment of the interim constitution to provide for a president and vice-president, with the prime minister remaining executive head of government, and to allow for the prime minister to be elected or ousted by a simple majority.

Those were aspects of a broad-ranging agreement signed on 25 June by leaders of the Seven-Party Alliance, which constituted the basis for proceeding to the formation of a new government, and I will refer later to other aspects of the agreement. After the agreement was signed, however, the Assembly was unable to proceed immediately to adopt the required amendments to the interim constitution, as the newly elected Madhesi parties, which had not been party to the aforementioned negotiations but form the fourth-largest bloc in the Assembly, demanded that undertakings given to them in a February agreement with the interim government should also be entrenched in constitutional amendments. Their interpretation of the February agreement includes the acceptance of the highly controversial demand for the Tarai plains of southern Nepal to become an autonomous Madhesi province within the future federal State. For twelve days, they prevented the Assembly from carrying out business. Only last Sunday, 13 July, were the amendments to the interim constitution voted by the Assembly, with members of Madhesi parties boycotting but no longer obstructing the proceedings.

With the conclusion of the 25 June agreement, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress announced his resignation, although until that can be submitted to the new president, he has remained at the head of the caretaker cabinet, in which ministers from the other two main parties, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) (UML) and the CPN(M) have ceased to participate. The most contentious and unresolved issue has been the sharing of posts and power among the parties. The Maoists have been acknowledged by the other parties to have the right, as the largest party in the Assembly, to name the prime minister. But both the Nepali Congress and the UML have publicly laid claim to the presidency, with the Nepali Congress stating that it will otherwise not participate in a new coalition Government. The Maoists continue to appeal for all major parties to participate in a Maoist-led Government, but have not accepted the preferred presidential nominees of either the Nepali Congress or the UML, and have now nominated a Madhesi, who is not from any of the major parties. Efforts to achieve consensus appear to have broken down ahead of tomorrow's vote, with potentially serious consequences for the support base of a new government.

A significant attribute of the presidency is that the president will be commander-in-chief of the Nepal army, acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers. The responsibilities within government for the security sector and for decisions regarding the future of the Maoist army have been an important element in the negotiations and one of particular relevance for the continuing role requested of the United Nations. The constitutional amendments introduce the position of leader of the opposition, who will be a member of the constitutional council, which considers appointments to constitutional bodies. But the Nepali Congress, which has publicly contemplated remaining in opposition, insisted that the leader of the opposition should also be a member of the National Security Council. That was voted down by the Maoists and the UML.

It was, however, agreed and provided by the constitutional amendments that members of political parties not included in the Government should be represented in the special committee to be established under article 146 of the interim constitution to supervise, integrate and rehabilitate the combatants of the Maoist army. That special committee will thus be quite large, and the 25 June agreement envisages that it may require a technical committee of experts functioning under its auspices.

The inter-party negotiations displayed wide differences of view among the parties regarding the future of the combatants, which were not resolved, although the process by which the special committee would carry out its task was elaborated somewhat. It is to collect information regarding the circumstances of those combatants registered and verified by UNMIN. The verified combatants will be offered a choice between an economic package and other unspecified alternatives for rehabilitation. Those who choose integration will be deemed eligible for possible integration with security bodies "after fulfilling the standard requirements". In response to concern that if the Maoist leadership heads the new government, it should not also continue to control a political army, the Maoist army will be under the supervision, control and direction of the multi-party special committee until integration and rehabilitation is complete. From the outset of integration and rehabilitation, Maoist combatants will have no involvement with any political organization, and those who have had dual political and military responsibilities will have to choose one or the other.

The 25 June agreement requires that the integration and rehabilitation of the Maoist combatants shall be carried out within six months, and in this context provided that a request would be made for UNMIN to continue monitoring the management of arms and armies for six more months. The Government thus wrote formally to the Secretary-General on 8 July requesting such ongoing monitoring and assistance in implementing that aspect of the 25 June agreement. The letter was received as the report of the Secretary-General (A/2008/454) was in the final stages of drafting, and the Secretary-General noted that it lacked the clarity required for him to recommend a continuing United Nations presence in the form of a special political mission and instructed me to seek further clarification. Shortly before leaving Kathmandu, I met with each of the leaders of the three largest parties: the Prime Minister, who is President of the Nepali Congress; the Chairman of the CPN(M), who it is expected would be prime minister of a Maoist-led government; and the General Secretary of the UML. Each of them confirmed that they wished UNMIN to continue as a special political mission headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in order to assist in taking the peace process forward to its logical conclusion. They noted the importance in the period ahead of not only continued monitoring of arms and armies, but also assistance in implementing the agreement on the management of arms and army personnel in accordance with the multi-party understanding of 25 June. That of course in no way detracts from the fact that the process remains and will remain a fully Nepalese-owned process.

Consistent with that and as already noted, the wishes of Nepal's Government and leading political parties have also been clarified to the Secretary-General by the Permanent Representative of Nepal. I am thus now authorized to convey to the Council the Secretary-General's recommendation that the mandate of UNMIN should be extended, as requested by Nepal, for a period of six months.

Shortly before leaving Nepal, I participated at ceremonies marking the closure of each of the five regional UNMIN offices — with some sadness, because I believe that their presence and the frequent visits of their personnel to the districts have had a significant mitigating effect on local conflicts, which are yet to be addressed by effective local governance or peace committees. As the Secretary-General's report noted, the Electoral Assistance Office closed at the end of May and the Office of Civil Affairs is now terminating with the closure of regional offices and the end of the current mandate.

Our plans envisage that, if the Council extends UNMIN's mandate, the Special Representative will continue to be supported by the Political Affairs Section while the Arms Monitoring Office will continue at approximately half its previous establishment of 186 arms monitors. I am advised that this is viable, for a time, but I hope that early decisions by the special committee supervising the Maoists combatants can reduce, for example, the burden of around-the-clock monitoring of eight weapon storage areas.

Meanwhile, UNMIN has been working closely with the United Nations country team to ensure the transfer of functions and experience at the end of this mandate period or, as early as possible within the period of any extension.

I must be frank in expressing my concern about how rapidly the new government will be able to move forward in implementing the 25 June agreement, which depends greatly on the degree of multi-party cooperation that survives the current disagreements over the sharing of posts. The agreement requires that the special committee will be formed and start work within 15 days of the formation of the Council of Ministers. Past experience suggests that an agreement on the full Council of Ministers may itself take some time after the election of the prime minister. The agreement then envisages a period of six months for the special committee to reach and implement decisions regarding integration and rehabilitation and provide that "the country will not bear any responsibility for verified combatants who have not been reintegrated or rehabilitated after six months".

At the same time, it will be recalled that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement requires an action plan for the "democratization" of the Nepal army to include determining its appropriate size, training the army in the values of democracy and human rights, ensuring its democratic structure and building its national and inclusive character.

One contentious aspect of the recent negotiations with the Madhesi parties was the precise nature of the commitment to greater inclusion of Madhesis in the Nepal army, which, in the constitutional amendment, has taken the form of a guarantee of the entry of all historically marginalized groups to the army on the basis of equality and inclusiveness.

The debate about the responsibility of for the Nepal army under new constitutional arrangements has drawn attention to the fact that, following the abolition of the monarchy, which in the past had exercised de facto control of the army, Nepal lacks the machinery for the effective accountability of the army to an elected government.

Two recent mutinies of lower-ranks against officers of the Nepal police and the armed police force have also highlighted the potential volatility of the security sector in the new political and social climate. Ideally, decisions about the future of the Maoist combatants should be taken in the context of broader decisions about the security sector.

However, these issues will require attention far beyond the next six months, in which the future of the Maoist combatants is to be decided. In this context, the Council will want to review progress, in order to ensure that good use is being made of the limited further presence of UNMIN being requested.

The Secretary-General thus recommends a review after three months, which would focus on further downsizing and other steps towards the end of the mandate, in the context of the new government's progress in deciding the future of the Maoist combatants. The Council will no doubt expect this to include a report that the minors and others excluded by UNMIN's verification have belatedly been discharged, with appropriate support to their reintegration.

This is by no means the only challenge facing Nepal before it can be said to be enjoying conditions of sustainable peace essential for the economic and social progress its people expect and deserve. I said to the Council in May that the lack of progress in delivering on compensation for victims of the conflict, investigation of disappearances, and return of property and displaced persons to their homes remains a source of deep grievances. The 25 June agreement makes fresh promises in these respects, including the establishment of commissions long ago required by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and other agreements.

The CPN(M) pledges in the agreement that the paramilitary functioning of its Young Communist League will be completely terminated and that it will fully comply with the laws of the land, while no mechanisms are to function in parallel to the government. The dangers of the vacuum of effective State authority at the local level have become increasingly evident during this period of protracted national-level negotiations. The constitutional amendments now provide that until local elections are able to be held, interim bodies will be formed at the district, municipality and village levels, with the participation and consensus of those political parties active at the local level.

Meanwhile, the disruption and boycott of the Constituent Assembly by the Madhesi parties and the strikes and demonstrations by those opposing their demands have shown how difficult may be the path to decisions regarding the form of federalism appropriate to Nepal.

Some Nepalis say that their peace process cannot be regarded as complete until a new constitution has been adopted and the first elections held accordingly; all are agreed that it is not complete while there are two armies in the country. It is to assist Nepal in reaching beyond that still dangerous condition that its main political actors all believe that a limited further presence of UNMIN is necessary and the Secretary-General supports their request.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by welcoming the Special Representative and also His Excellency the Ambassador of Nepal. It is very good to have him here and we welcome the constructive relationship that the Government of Nepal and the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) have created between them.

My country very much welcomes the Secretary-General's latest report on UNMIN. We do welcome UNMIN's continuing positive role in Nepal's peace process, and that includes the preparations for the historic elections of 10 April. These, in turn, cleared the way for the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly on 28 May and the subsequent declaration of Nepal as a federal republic and we were able to hear from the Special Representative a little bit more about the political context, which was very helpful.

Nepal's elections created the most diverse and representative assembly in the country's history. The result is a huge credit to Nepal and also a huge opportunity — a real chance to strengthen Nepal's democratic institutions and address the issues that fuelled the conflict.

However, as the report makes clear and as we heard from the Special Representative, challenges, of course, remain. Despite elections and prolonged negotiations between the parties, it has not been possible to reach agreement on the formation of a new government. The announcement of the election for a new president on 19 July represents progress, but there does seem a continuing lack of trust and consensus between the parties.

Any further delay in forming the government risks undermining the people of Nepal's confidence in the democratic process and we hope, therefore, that we can all recognize the importance of encouraging the parties to work together, to respect the mandate given to them following the elections and to establish a government that can start to tackle the important challenges facing Nepal. We stand ready, for our part, to support that new government.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the future of former combatants continue to be an issue of special concern. A constant theme of the Secretary-General's report on UNMIN has been the need to take early action to resolve this issue, and it is disappointing that, so far, the parties have been unable to reach agreement on this important question.

We therefore believe that swift and full implementation of the 25 June agreement is a priority. This will require the reconstitution of the special committee provided for in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It will also mean that, in accordance with article 146 of the Interim Constitution, the inclusion of representatives of the Assembly's political parties. The United Kingdom agrees that UNMIN will be well-placed to support this work through the monitoring of arms and armed personnel and through the work of a special political mission and, more generally, the Special Representative.

My Government welcomes the proposed reconfiguration of UNMIN. This will significantly reduce staff levels, but it will also ensure the retention of the core capacity in monitoring analysis and political engagement to allow UNMIN to support Nepal's peace process at the Government of Nepal's request during the next six months. It is important that the Mission continues to be responsive to the requirements of both the governments of Nepal and this Council and is able to reduce its presence further, as soon as it is appropriate.

We welcome the letter and the subsequent clarification that the Permanent Representative of Nepal has been able to provide. We fully support the extension of UNMIN's mandate for a further six months and we hope negotiations on the draft resolution to achieve this can be concluded quickly, so that we can adopt it early next week.

We also agree with the Secretary-General that there should be no need for UNMIN to continue its arms monitoring function beyond the next phase of its mandate. It is in the interest of neither Nepal nor the United Nations for UNMIN to remain any longer than is necessary. It is also clear that the precise timetable for UNMIN's withdrawal will depend to some extent on the willingness of the political parties to create the conditions for that withdrawal. That means, in particular, through implementation of the 25 June Agreement. The Security Council must, in our view, make clear its expectations of the parties in that regard.

I should like to conclude by offering our thanks to Ian Martin and his team. We welcome his decision to remain to see UNMIN through the next and final phase of the process. UNMIN has played an important role in supporting the peace process, and we look to the Government of Nepal to make full use of the Mission's expertise over the next six months.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I wish to begin by welcoming the presence of Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal, and of the Permanent Representative of Nepal. I should also like to thank the Special Representative for his comprehensive overview of the current situation in Nepal and of the assistance that the United Nations has given, is giving and can continue to give to the ongoing peace process.

Nepal has recently experienced many historic moments — a series of what I would call "firsts". In April, the Nepalese elected a Constituent Assembly for the first time. On 28 May, the Assembly met for the first time and decided to change the form of the State by making Nepal a federal republic. Tomorrow, Nepal will appoint its first president.

The Nepalese can be proud of the peace that they have built. In no peace process has the word "ownership" been so meaningful because, while Nepal has certainly benefited from the support of the United Nations and the international community, it has also been the driving force behind its own peace process.

In particular, Belgium wishes to congratulate Nepal on the proportion of women elected to the Constituent Assembly, who represent more than a third of those elected. That performance puts Nepal in fourteenth place on a list of 135 countries. Since the Constituent Assembly is mandated to chart the country's future, it is essential that women, who represent more than 50 per cent of the population, be equally involved.

While stressing progress, we should not close our eyes to the challenges ahead, to which we believe it is our duty to draw the attention of the Nepalese authorities. The Secretary-General highlights the fact that the human rights situation remains very worrisome. We share that concern. A lasting peace cannot be based on extrajudicial executions or on impunity for past acts of violence. In particular, we encourage the new Government to provide for transitional justice mechanisms.

The issue of weapons and armies must not remain the "poor relation" of the peace process. We congratulate the parties on the 25 June Agreement and, in particular, on the provisions related to the strategy for discharge from the cantonments. It is essential that those provisions be implemented as soon as a Government has been formed. Here, we should also like to stress the urgent case of minors who have not yet been demobilized.

The issue that particularly concerns us today is that of UNMIN's future. At the request of the parties, the United Nations assisted the peace process during its crucial phase. Now we must see how the Organization can best continue that assistance, in response to the request of the Government of Nepal.

We sincerely encourage the parties to implement the 25 June Agreement — particularly those provisions relating to the cantonments — swiftly and in good faith. It is in that spirit that we can support a six-month renewal of UNMIN's mandate.

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to offer our greetings to the Permanent Representative of Nepal, whose presence in the Security Council is welcomed by Costa Rica.

We listened to Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal, who updated us on the situation in Nepal and provided an analysis of what the Secretary-General and he consider to be that country's main achievements, challenges and problems in the light of the new situation following the elections for the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies, the declaration of its new status as a federal and democratic republic, and the announcement that, as we hope, a president will be elected tomorrow. We thank Mr. Martin for his presence and for his contributions to that process and this debate.

Given all that, and with regard to the case of Nepal, we should consider the challenges and problems of societies that have undergone such profound changes. On the one hand, it is commendable that the Nepalese have chosen to establish a democratic republic as their form of Government. On the other, it is imperative to bear in mind that such a Government does not take shape spontaneously or easily — quite the contrary. All too often, when peoples have been subjected to totalitarian forms of Government, they find that, once they have gained the freedom to establish institutions that respect the will of the majority, peaceful dissent, pluralism and basic human rights, divisions of class, culture, aspirations and experience forcefully emerge. In addition, new obstacles — sometimes unforeseen and unimagined — emerge in the building of a democracy.

In such circumstances, what is required is firm and illustrious leadership, endowed with vision and a sense of history, to help guide the people in a constructive manner and to prevent petty, egoistic interests or demagoguery removed from reality from prevailing. This is the time to learn to compromise, while fighting by legitimate means for the interests of those who are being represented. It is precisely the time for the force of arms to give fully way to reason.

Nepal has begun to build its democracy, and the United Nations must continue playing an important role in that process. That is why Costa Rica has supported the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) for an additional six-month period. During that period, we hope that the political parties and their leaders, assisted by civil society in its diverse forms, will begin to address in a democratic manner the problems related to the needed strengthening of the police forces, both with regard to the crucial technical aspects of providing security for the population, and with regard to human rights and the rule of law. Incidents such as those in which certain police sectors were involved after the elections must not recur.

For Costa Rica, the involvement of children in armed conflicts is unacceptable. We know that, in Nepal as in other countries that have experienced serious and bloody conflict, it is a reality that cannot be hidden. Nevertheless, we call for the swift demobilization of those individuals and for their social reintegration, given their status as minors. To that end, they must be offered education, health care and opportunities so that they can realize their potential as human beings. Impunity too is unacceptable for Costa Rica. Therefore, we believe that Nepal should establish transitional justice mechanisms that will guarantee respect for the rights both of victims and of the accused. There will be no lasting peace without justice. It is unacceptable for those who carried out acts of extrajudicial justice, whichever group they belong to, not to be tried appropriately.

The issue of human rights is fundamental. It is part of the foundation upon which the United Nations is built. We know that the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in that country have been working together. We hope to see that collaboration strengthened and yielding the anticipated results.

As we see it, the extension of UNMIN's mandate has one central aim: disarmament, including the management of the arms of personnel in cantonments and the integration of such personnel into the Nepal Army or other activities beneficial to them and to the country, thus completing the reconciliation and peacemaking process in accordance with the content of paragraph 64 of the Secretary-General's report.

That should be UNMIN's main undertaking during this phase, while other United Nations offices and entities, as well as the Nepalese Government and civil society, should focus on other aspects and tasks that are indispensable to peaceful, democratic reconstruction. Activities related to arms, peacemaking and reconciliation constitute the main added value that UNMIN can provide during this delicate period.

Costa Rica understands that peace, human rights and socio-economic development are the three pillars of the raison d'être of the United Nations. That is no coincidence. It is the logical conclusion after observing the history of humankind. Nepal has now broached a new phase of peace and the further strengthening and protection of human rights, at a time when the global economy is in not in the best of situations. The rapid surge in the prices of oil and basic foodstuffs has had an impact on broad sectors of the population, in particular in least developed countries. That further complicates the tasks that lie ahead of the people and leadership of Nepal. In turn, it requires great wisdom and solidarity, and we trust that they will exhibit both of those.

Finally, we would like to indicate that Costa Rica has stressed the need to establish a clear date or benchmark for the conclusion of the Mission. That emphasis has several purposes, including, first, to remind ourselves, the United Nations, that missions cannot be extended indefinitely. Secondly, the Nepalese, who have retained control and ownership of the process, should exercise this fully as of a particular moment. At the same time, they should have all the time they need to prepare for that; the same applies to the troop-contributing countries and all those participating in the Mission.

Furthermore, in this specific case, this will also send a signal to the Nepalese leaders that time is marching on and that they must therefore redouble their efforts to reach agreement and undertake action. Especially with regard to the demobilization or transfer of combatants, leaders cannot shirk that difficult and delicate task, even though it entails costs of several kinds. It would thus be better to proceed while UNMIN is present on the ground in order to draw on all the assistance that the Mission can provide — albeit within a defined time limit. It is not about trying to rush matters or attempting to do things before it is possible. Rather, it is about expediting action and acting accordingly.

The people of Nepal are putting an end to years of armed confrontation and are on a new path towards prosperity. Costa Rica wishes them well in that endeavour and reiterates its staunch support, in areas where we can be of assistance, so that the success gained to date can be further built upon.

Mr. La Yifan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Ian Martin, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing. I thank him and the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) for their hard work over the past year and a half.

As a neighbouring country of Nepal, China takes great pleasure in seeing the continuous positive progress in the peace process in Nepal. On 10 April, Nepal successfully conducted the election of its Constituent Assembly. On 28 May, the Constituent Assembly held its first meeting and declared the establishment of a federal democratic republic and the posts of President and Vice-President, and decided that it would draft a new constitution within two years. At present, various parties are engaged in positive and active consultation on the formation of the new government. Tomorrow, moreover, Nepal will hold its presidential election.

China has a positive view of those important developments and appreciates the tireless efforts of the parties and the people of Nepal. We expect and believe that the people and the Government of Nepal have the ability and the wisdom to continue to settle outstanding issues in the peace process through dialogue and consultation and to achieve long-term peace, stability and development in accordance with the established plan.

China appreciates the strong support provided by UNMIN in the election of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal. At present, Nepal is at a critical transitional period. Recently, Nepal made a request to the Secretary-General in the hope that UNMIN would be reduced in size, that its mandate would be extended for six months and that it would continue to facilitate the monitoring of the management of arms and armed personnel.

China supports the extension of UNMIN's mandate at the request of Nepal, with the prerequisite of a clear mandate. We encourage UNMIN to continue the work of monitoring arms and armed personnel so as to create a good security environment for a smooth post-election transition in Nepal.

It is necessary to point out that in the end that the peace process in Nepal should be led by the Nepalese people and that issues related to peaceful reconstruction should likewise be settled by relying on the wisdom of the people themselves.

We believe that, with the support of the international community, a new Nepal will be able to return once again to the path of peace and development.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Ian Martin for his valuable briefing on the situation in Nepal. I wish also to welcome the presence at today's meeting of the Permanent Representative of Nepal.

We note that, following the election of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal on 10 April, the peace process seems to be following its normal course. While we can observe some disruption, that is only to be expected, because Nepal is going through a period of political change. We have taken note of the first meeting of the Assembly, which took place on 28 May, which adopted important measures, including in particular the proclamation of a federal democratic republic in Nepal.

As part of the progress made, we welcome the 25 June signing by the political parties of the important Agreement to amend the Constitution and take the peace process forward. We believe that the commitment undertaken by the parties to the Agreement to establish five commissions to address national peace and rehabilitation, State restructuring, an investigation into disappeared persons, land reform and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission represents an important step forward. In the context of Nepal, it is above all crucial to have a participatory and inclusive process that includes all social and political actors. Obviously, that includes the Maoist faction.

There are many encouraging signs reflecting the determination of the political class to choose dialogue, which is the only alternative for a real settlement in Nepal. We hope that the determination to find common ground will soon lead to the establishment of a consensus Government — as provided for by the Interim Constitution — whose priorities will include tackling the country's numerous development and reconstruction challenges. That requires that stability be ensured. We must therefore remain very vigilant about the issue of security, as there have been some violations of human rights, a surge in crime and the emergence of new armed groups. Those are indications that, despite the progress made, the situation remains fragile. In any case, steps must be taken to strengthen policing activities and transitional justice mechanisms.

Likewise, the lengthy period of political instability in large part explains the country's economic fragility, which is compounded by the economic crisis. Efforts to strengthen peace in Nepal must also include the adoption of an appropriate economic recovery programme based on poverty reduction. Moreover, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Nepal 2008-2010, which is now in effect, should be strengthened and supported by the international community. To that end, we welcome the steps taken to develop a peacebuilding support strategy. It is above all critical that we address the problem of unemployment, reintegrate young people and rehabilitate basic services.

Given the useful work it is doing in the service of the Nepalese people, we welcome the efforts and commitment of the United Nations Mission in Nepal. Although there are still challenges for the Mission to overcome — including monitoring the management of weapons and forces, administering the cantonments and demining activities — Nepalese officials have indicated that they would like the Mission's mandate extended. We support that request. We also favour continued discussions between the Secretary-General and Nepalese officials to determine a new configuration for the Mission.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): The United States thanks Special Representative of the Secretary-General Martin for his briefing. We are pleased to support the Government of Nepal's request for an extension of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) at a reduced level so that it can complete remaining elements of its mandate in carrying out the peace process. Today, I would like to make four points.

First, the United States strongly supports the United Nations Mission in Nepal, commends the work of Special Representative Martin and his staff and looks forward to working with him to complete the remaining portions of the UNMIN mandate, especially with regard to the management of arms and armed personnel.

Secondly, the United States urges all of Nepal's political parties to maintain their resolve to settle their differences through peaceful dialogue so that the future of the Nepalese people may be characterized by democracy and economic development.

Thirdly, the United States also strongly encourages the new Government to address, to the extent possible, the concerns of historically disadvantaged groups, including in the Terai, so that all parties and groups committed to a new democratic Nepal will share equally in the process of nation-building.

Finally, the United States has committed itself to providing nearly $10 million in assistance in support of Nepal's transition to democracy in areas such as security sector reform, conflict resolution, civil society, supporting legal institutions and political parties. We urge other donors to offer maximum support to ensure that Nepal makes a successful transition.

We look forward to the continued work of UNMIN and to the reports of the Secretary-General in that regard. We remain committed to helping ensure that UNMIN successfully carries out its full mandate.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We, too, thank Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal and head of the United Nations Mission in that country, for his comprehensive briefing and for introducing the latest report (S/2008/454) on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process. We also welcome the Ambassador of Nepal to the meeting this morning.

Since the adoption of resolution 1740 (2007) and the subsequent establishment of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), the Nepalese people have made significant strides towards restoring peace and democracy in their country. South Africa commends those efforts. We welcome in particular the successful holding and conclusion of the elections to the Constituent Assembly on 10 April. The elections, which saw a large number of women elected, reflected the diversity of Nepal's population.

Now that the electoral process has been successfully completed, the next step is the formation of the Government and the relevant institutions of that country. We have no doubt that the Nepalese people will also be successful in that venture. We are confident that the relevant parties in Nepal will, in due course, complete that process. We hope that the international community will support the new

Government of Nepal in its efforts to address the challenges ahead.

My delegation is encouraged by the progress made in the peace process in Nepal since the formation of the Constituent Assembly. As noted in paragraph 4 of the report of the Secretary-General, the establishment of a republic in Nepal took place in a generally peaceful environment. Notwithstanding that progress, the report of the Secretary-General acknowledges that significant challenges remain in the country, including reaching an agreement on the basis for the formation of a new Government, the completion of the peace process and the country's long-term development. In that connection, we encourage all parties in Nepal to continue to work together in a spirit of cooperation and to pursue dialogue in order to address those challenges.

My delegation underlines the importance of national ownership and the responsibility of Nepalese stakeholders in addressing the challenges facing their country. In that regard, we call upon all parties in Nepal to uphold previous agreements and ensure that the country is restored to the path towards sustainable peace, stability and prosperity.

With regard to the role of UNMIN, my delegation applauds the entire staff of the Mission for their dedication and invaluable role in support of the Government and the people of Nepal. We commend in particular UNMIN's work on arms monitoring, mine action, electoral support, gender and social inclusion, and child protection.

Finally, with respect to the request of the Government of Nepal for the continuation of UNMIN, on a smaller scale, to engage in the remainder of its mandate tasks for a period of another six months, South Africa stands ready to support that request. We hope that this mandate extension will enable UNMIN to complete the remaining activities, in particular the ongoing work on monitoring the management of arms and army personnel. We also encourage the new Government of Nepal to utilize UNMIN's expertise as it carries out its own priorities aimed at benefiting all the Nepalese people.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ian Martin, for his briefing, and would like to express our appreciation for the work that he has accomplished since he was appointed.

The general development of the situation over the past several months has indeed been positive. We welcome in particular the very satisfactory conditions in which the elections were held. This was a success for the Nepalese people, and also a success for the United Nations, which played an essential role in re-establishing democracy.

Nevertheless, we must remain vigilant. The delay in forming a new Government — which we understand will take place soon — shows that the political process remains complex and fragile. Building peace and democracy in Nepal constitutes a long-term process which has only just started. The new Government will rapidly have to tackle numerous challenges.

In these circumstances, we are of the view that the Security Council should respond positively to the Nepalese authorities' request for an extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) for a further six months. In this regard, my delegation would like to thank the United Kingdom for having prepared a draft resolution in this regard, which we support.

By continuing its work in monitoring the management of arms and armies over this period — a task on which the Mission should focus — UNMIN will give the new authorities time to find a lasting solution to pending problems linked to the implementation of the peace process. The meaning of UNMIN's continued presence, however, must be clear: it would be a temporary arrangement which cannot and must not replace the search for a lasting solution to the problem of the future of the former Maoist combatants — quite the contrary. The Nepalese parties have sought United Nations support for the peace process and, for their part, they must shoulder their responsibilities in order to advance this process. The Secretary-General's midterm report will be an opportunity for the Security Council to assess the progress that has been made.

In this regard, I would like to express our deep concern at the complete lack of progress made in the discharge of children from Maoist cantonments. Nothing can justify this absence of progress, and the Security Council must remain vigilant and firm in dealing with this particularly unacceptable situation which has gone on for far too long.

At the end of UNMIN's mandate, the international community will of course remain committed to the Nepalese people. The future government will have to identify its needs in this area and, in particular, to assess the appropriateness of possibly maintaining more streamlined United Nations presence in support of the political process.

In any event, Nepal can count on the solidarity of the European Union, which is the largest donor of development assistance to this country. The European Union has been strongly engaged in support of the peace process and, in particular, has deployed a large election observation mission consisting of some 100 short- and long-term observers. The Union will continue to actively support democracy-building and economic and social development in Nepal.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me begin by joining previous speakers in thanking Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal, for his briefing, and in thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2008/454).

After years of internal conflict, Nepal deserves peace, stability and prosperity. Momentum in realizing this hope is now evolving in Nepal. We congratulate the people and the Government of Nepal on the successful conclusion of the Constituent Assembly election and on the progress made towards a democratic, representative process and the creation of a federal democratic republic.

That accomplishment is indeed a historic triumph for the people of Nepal, and we are looking forward to the successful holding of the presidential election tomorrow. The role of the Nepalese Electoral Commission in the Constituent Assembly election is commendable. The Commission has served as an important catalyst in the promotion of electoral democracy in the country. My delegation also recognizes the 25 June 2008 signing by the Seven-Party Alliance of an agreement which provides for the time-bound solution of some key issues in the peace process.

Those achievements should serve as a stepping stone for further tangible progress on other critical goals as stipulated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). We therefore believe that all concerned parties in Nepal should remain committed to the peace process and exercise the utmost restraint with regard to actions that could undermine the peace process.

The conclusion of the Constituent Assembly election is only the beginning of the hard work of hammering out a democratic process and the formation of a representative government. In the post-election period, there remain critical matters that the future government of Nepal will have to tackle.

As the Secretary-General observed in his report, completion of the peace process remains a challenge. Management of arms and arms personnel still needs to be completed; this is one of the main pillars of the CPA. Former combatants have yet to be integrated and rehabilitated. That will require not only sufficient funding but also institutional and administrative measures. In this regard, my delegation attaches great importance to the formation of a special committee mandated to verify combatants and to integrate and rehabilitate them.

Robust democracy in Nepal will come about if support is truly popular and includes all segments of Nepalese society across political lines and ethnicity. In this regard, we welcome the representation of a variety of ethnic groups that had previously been under-represented in the Assembly.

With regard to the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), my delegation commends the Mission, under the leadership of Mr. Martin, for the technical assistance and advisory services it provided to the Nepalese authorities before and during the election. With the successful conclusion of the election, my delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's recommendation for a phased, gradual drawdown and withdrawal of UNMIN staff. As to the future of UNMIN, we take note of the Government of Nepal's letter of 8 July 2008 which, inter alia, requests an extension of the remainder of UNMIN's mandate for an additional six months.

Indonesia believes that since UNMIN's deployment was requested by Nepal, its future should naturally be decided by the people and the Government of that country. For its part, the Council should stand ready to respond to the wishes of the Nepalese people unanimously and decisively, as it did when UNMIN was established in January 2007. Indonesia thus supports the request of the Government of Nepal and the recommendation of the Secretary-General, as just conveyed by Mr. Ian Martin, for the extension of the mandate of UNMIN for a period of six months. Continuing on a smaller scale, UNMIN could focus on the ongoing work of monitoring the management of arms and armed personnel, and assisting Nepal in moving the peace process towards its conclusion.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Nepal, for his detailed briefing about the latest developments in the situation in Nepal. In recent times, the political situation in that country has undergone some important, positive changes that we welcome. We are convinced that they will have an important positive impact on the course of the peace process.

The holding of free democratic elections was followed by a peaceful transition from a monarchic to a republican form of Government. The election of the president of the country is to be held on 19 July. We hope that that is going to be another important milestone in the development of the peace process.

We expect that the 25 June agreement between the political parties of the country will have meaningful importance for efforts to move forward the democratic process. The signing of that agreement was possible thanks to the willingness of the main political forces to engage in constructive joint work. We hope that a similar spirit of cooperation and compromise will be demonstrated by the Nepalese parties in their approach to resolving other matters in carrying out the tasks of the peace process.

After the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the main part of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) mandate was successfully completed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the head of the Mission, Mr. Martin, and all of his colleagues, for their fruitful and highly professional work in carrying out their mandate. We support the request of Nepal to extend the Mission in Nepal for six further months in a downsized form, and we agree with the Mission's mandate to monitor the implementation of measures taken in respect of the arms and armed personnel of the parties and to assist the parties in implementing their agreement on the management of the arms of the parties.

The report of the Secretary-General reaffirms the fact that the presence of the Mission has great potential to give Nepal assistance in the area that they have delineated. We endorse the recommendation of the Secretary-General regarding the gradual, stage-by-stage downsizing of the strength of the Mission. On the whole, we take an optimistic view of the prospects for further progress in the peace process in Nepal, the main responsibility for which continues to be borne by the leaders and people of that country.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, I would like to echo those who have thanked Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the information presented in his briefing. We are grateful to him for his efforts and the efforts deployed by the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN).

We would also like to congratulate the Nepalese people on the first session of the Constituent Assembly, held on 20 May, and the decision to abolish the monarchy, in a peaceful manner, in favour of a democratic federal republic in Nepal. We believe that that constitutes a milestone in Nepal's history. We are pleased to see the Seven-Party Alliance, which came into being on 27 May and has helped eradicate a number of obstacles impeding the establishment of a new government. We hope that the parties will be able to reach agreement shortly on the distribution of the various portfolios and that the new government will be set up as soon as possible.

In spite of the partial successes achieved by the Nepalese people, further impetus should be given to the peace agreements reached between the Nepalese parties. We are concerned by the information contained in the Secretary-General's report concerning the deteriorating security situation in certain regions, in particular the upsurge in crime carried out by armed groups, abductions, blackmail, the emergence of new armed groups and renewed protest campaigns and demands by certain marginalized groups. All of that stands in the way of the political process. We therefore invite the new government, which we hope will assume its functions as soon as possible, to further strengthen State institutions on the basis of the rule of law.

We also hope to see the security situation improve, an end put to impunity and the rights of marginalized groups protected in accordance with the new constitution in order to bolster national reconciliation. Furthermore, we believe that the establishment of a single national army with a single commander-in-chief and the ongoing efforts for the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants are key factors for stability and peace for the State, as they will contribute towards development and prosperity for the Nepalese people.

At this juncture, the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement must be fully respected, as must the provisions of other recent agreements, in particular with regard to the reintegration of combatants, their rehabilitation, the management of arms, the demobilization of minors and the response to the concerns of marginalized groups. That must all be done in close cooperation and coordination with the United Nations, in accordance with paragraph 9 of the Secretary-General's report.

We set great store by the work carried out by the Nepal Country Team and support its strategy, which is based on providing development aid to Nepal in order to build peace through the reform of the State, ensuring its recovery and preventing the emergence of conflict, thus assisting in the process of national reconciliation. That will largely hinge upon the resolve of the Nepalese people themselves.

Finally, we approve the recommendations issued by the Secretary-General to extend the mandate of UNMIN in accordance with the request made by the Nepalese Government, and underscore the importance of maintaining a United Nations presence in support of the political process and its actions to support the peace process.

Mr. Skračić (Croatia): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Ian Martin for his briefing and expressing my delegation's appreciation and congratulations for his successful leadership of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) during what has proved to be a pivotal and genuinely transformative period for Nepal.

In many ways, Nepal has emerged as a new society. The Nepalese people and their political representatives, who have demonstrated an admirable ability for cooperation and consensus, deserve our congratulations for the successful holding of elections in April and the subsequent forming of the Constituent Assembly, leading to the peaceful establishment of a republic.

However, the peace process, which began in 2006 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, is not over yet. The elections were a crucial stage in the peace process, a milestone rather than a destination and the peace process is still evolving.

In this context, we salute the 25 June agreement between the political parties to amend the constitution and move the peace process forward. It is now crucial that all parties in Nepal sustain their commitment to an inclusive and constructive political process during this transition period. The participation of traditionally marginalized groups and civil society is no less important.

It is my delegation's hope to see the swift formation of a new democratically-elected government that will focus without delay on the outstanding commitments arising out of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and also on the immediate challenges that have a direct impact on the well-being of the Nepalese population, such as food shortages and the rise in fuel prices.

Through the UNMIN mandate, the United Nations has given an important contribution to this historic process of Nepal's return to peace, stability and democracy. The outcome represents a major success for Nepal, the United Nations and the Security Council. We agree that now is the time to adapt the United Nations presence to the new reality and to take note of the request of the interim Government of Nepal, contained in its letter of 8 July, for a six-month continuation of UNMIN, at a smaller scale, to engage itself in the remainder of the mandate.

While the management of arms and armed personnel remain the focus of UNMIN's mandate, we would like to reiterate the Secretary-General's emphasis on the need to achieve a transition to a durable and permanent solution. While the national ownership of this process is not in question, we concur with the Secretary-General's assessment that, at this point, monitoring of arms and armed personnel should continue to be provided within the framework of a special political mission that can continue to offer the necessary support for the completion of the peace process.

As we are focusing on UNMIN's exit strategy, we are mindful that the report has rightly identified remaining challenges of the post-election period that require sustained effort and attention. Notably, these would be the discharge of minors, the integration of Maoist combatants and the democratization of the army.

While we believe that it will be up to the new government to address these issues as a matter of priority, my delegation believes that we should avoid the impression that UNMIN's gradual disengagement somehow implies that these aspects of the peace process are no longer relevant and can be disregarded.

In conclusion, we believe that the Nepalese people deserve our continued support in consolidating peace, democracy and development and that the United Nations country team is well-placed to play a central role.

Mr. De Vengoechea (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, we would like to thank you and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and leader of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), Ian Martin for his report. The delegation of Panama is deeply grateful to Mr. Martin and to all the UNMIN staff for the laudable work that they have accomplished over the last 18 months of the Mission's mandate.

The holding of elections and the establishment of a Constituent Assembly are nothing less than historic acts for Nepal and we believe that UNMIN played an essential role in these events.

We note that the delegation of Nepal will be taking the floor in this debate after Council members have spoken. As we have said on earlier occasions, by way of principle, we believe that the States that are directly involved in the issues being addressed by the Security Council should always, when possible, be able to make their statements before Council members take the floor.

As is indicated in the Secretary-General's report, the majority of UNMIN's mandate has already been implemented. Those provisions of 1740 (2007) that remain to be fulfilled, particularly the monitoring of arms and armed personnel, in support of the peace agreement between the parties, should underpin UNMIN's new mandate, as was expressed by the Government of Nepal.

For that reason, in the resolution to be adopted by the Council, it is crucial that we maintain the character of this mission as a mission with specific, time-bound aims. The chief responsibility for successfully concluding the peace and democratization process will then fall to the Nepalese, with the United Nations playing a support role, which, although on a smaller scale, remains an important one.

The responsibility to be shouldered by the new elected leaders in Nepal is immense and the obstacles to be overcome are enormous. Reforming the security sector, for example, is a critical undertaking. The existence of two armies is inherently destabilizing and the past refusal of the parties to the conflict to discuss their future has exacerbated the situation.

As we did in our own country at the start of the 1990s, Panama encourages both the Maoist army and the Nepal army to also voluntarily disarm. Once this has been achieved, Panama would support the establishment of a civilian police force that would include, when viable, members of both groups.

Additionally, the establishment of a civilian police force should be part of a package of rehabilitation and compensation for those who leave the army once and for all. The integration of the Maoist combatants into a more democratic Nepalese army would only further increase the size of the military structure in a country with scarce resources and facing minimal external threats.

The protection of human rights would be well-served by the implementation of the rule of law, and the ending the culture of impunity in Nepal is also an issue that deserves the immediate attention of the new Government.

In view of all these challenges, we are concerned that the Nepalese parties, facing a new political landscape have been unable — or unwilling — to maintain the party unity to which they committed before the elections. This reticence appears to be part of a short-term partisan strategy of political jockeying for the post-electoral period, to the detriment of the peace process and the long-term future of the country.

Building lasting peace in Nepal will require all parties to accept the electoral results and the political landscape that emerges, and for the parties to work together in a spirit of cooperation and responsibility within a new majority-led government. Lack of cooperation will jeopardize the major national achievements that now lie within reach of the people, causing disillusionment among the Nepalese people and distrust of their leaders.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): At the outset, I wish to warmly thank Mr. Martin for his clear and comprehensive briefing on the situation in Nepal. I would like to express our strongest appreciation for the historical successes achieved in Nepal under his tenure as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with the final goal being the peaceful establishment of a federal democratic republic.

The commitment to democracy of the Nepalese people and parties should obviously be praised first and foremost, but we should also pay tribute to the able guidance that Mr. Martin has ensured in his functions.

We have learned, with some concern, from the report of the Secretary-General that the post-election period in Nepal faces several difficulties, notably, an increase in criminality in armed groups and a lack of progress in the human rights situation. Probably the most worrying finding is lack of full trust among the parties to the peace process, which has, so far, prevented the creation of a new and inclusive government reflecting the outcome of the elections.

The 25 June agreement has to be welcomed, but the report notes that the agreement leaves some key issues unresolved. For instance, we share the concern of the Secretary-General for the lack of progress in the discharge of minors from the Maoist combatant contingents. In this regard, I would like to stress that the successful holding of the April elections, as historical as that was, should be followed by concrete and timely actions to address the underlying challenges that still affect the Nepalese people.

Regarding these challenges, viable solutions can only come from the Nepalese themselves. At the same time, we believe that the assistance of the international community will continue to be required for complex processes such as security sector reform, inclusion of women and traditionally marginalized groups in peacebuilding efforts, and accountability mechanisms for past crimes.

Against this background, we have taken note of the Nepalese request for a six-month extension of the current work of the United Nations in the monitoring of arms and armed personnel. In this regard, we support the idea of maintaining a United Nations presence to shore up the post-election process within the terms of the reasonable recommendations of the Secretary-General.

We appreciate the Nepalese support for the idea that the extension should be granted in the form of a special political mission, so that the United Nations can continue to work with the Nepalese authorities to reach a durable and permanent solution to the underlying issues. Therefore, we are ready to support the draft resolution prepared by the United Kingdom delegation, which we thank for its efforts.

We also appreciate the plans for substantive downsizing of the Mission. In that regard, I would like to emphasize that the phasing out of the civil affairs component should be matched by a corresponding reinforcement of the programmes implemented in the same areas by the United Nations country team and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We welcome UNMIN's efforts to ensure a smooth transition of expertise and projects in that field.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Viet Nam.

I wish to join other Council members in thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2008/454) and Mr. Ian Martin for his briefing.

We would like to congratulate Nepal and its people on the recent positive political developments following the convening on 28 May of the Constituent Assembly, especially the active engagement of major Nepalese parties in political dialogues that resulted in the Agreement reached on 25 June 2008 to take the political process forward. In that connection, we call on all parties concerned to make full use of this momentum to advance the peace process in the country, most immediately the presidential elections to be held tomorrow.

Experience has shown that, besides threats to social security as a legacy of war, countries emerging from a prolonged civil conflict have to cope with developmental challenges, damaged infrastructure and weak institutional capacities. We share the common understanding that there remain challenges to peace and development in Nepal — for example, the building of new governance institutions, not to mention the recent rise in fuel prices, the food shortages and, hence, the increasing poverty in the country.

Given those challenges and the multifaceted need for Nepal to sustain its post-conflict endeavours, it is necessary to take an integrated approach, which requires not only political will and security measures, but also social and economic development programmes at all levels. The international community and donors also have a very important role to play, in response to the request of the Nepalese Government.

In that context, we welcome the efforts by the United Nations country team to put in effect the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Nepal during the period 2008-2010, during the next phase of which priority will be given to the successful implementation of concrete development actions that can bring about changes in the daily lives of the Nepalese people.

We also would like to commend the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), its leader, Mr. Ian Martin, and his staff for the work that it has done so far within its mandate, especially the electoral monitoring and technical assistance that it has provided to the Election Commission, thus contributing significantly to the success of Nepal's Constituent Assembly elections, held in April.

In accordance with our position that, since UNMIN was established at the request of the Nepalese Government, any decision on its mandate should be made with due consideration of Nepal's proposal, we therefore support the Secretary-General's recommendation, based on the letter dated 8 July 2008 from the Nepalese Mission, to extend UNMIN's mandate for six months as a special political Mission focused on monitoring arms and armed personnel, in order to complete the peace process in Nepal. We take this opportunity to thank the United Kingdom mission for preparing the draft resolution on UNMIN's mandate, and we look forward to its timely adoption.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Viet Nam's unswerving support for peace and development in Nepal. We are strongly convinced that, with their ownership and self-determination, the authorities and the people of Nepal will continue to accomplish further achievements in consolidating peace and promoting socio-economic growth throughout the country.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I call on the representative of Nepal.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal): Once again, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on Viet Nam's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. I thank you for enabling me to participate in the discussion related to the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/454) on extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) in accordance with Nepal's request.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative, Mr. Ian Martin, the officials of UNMIN and the Department of Political Affairs for their continuous support for meeting Nepal's request to benefit the peace process in Nepal. As Special Representative Martin has already informed members, Nepal has completed several important milestones in its peace process, which is nearing its logical conclusion.

With the successful holding of the Constituent Assembly elections and the declaration of Nepal as a federal democratic republic, a new political transformation has begun with a view to achieving a lasting and durable peace in the country. We are likely to see the first president of the Republic of Nepal elected tomorrow. We will soon have a new government, which will most likely be led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which has won the highest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly.

UNMIN has made important contributions to this process. When the Security Council created the Mission in January 2007 at our request, its mandate included monitoring the ceasefire, monitoring and assisting with the elections and monitoring the management of arms and armed personnel. Some of those tasks have already been accomplished. However, we have yet to conclude our arrangements on the management of arms and arms personnel, including the future of the combatants in the cantonments, which are being monitored by UNMIN.

Therefore, the Government decided to request, in a letter dated 8 July 2008 from the Permanent Mission of Nepal, the continuation of UNMIN's mandate for another six months beyond 23 July 2008, on a smaller scale so that it can carry out the remainder of its tasks, which relate mostly to the ongoing work of monitoring the management of arms and armed personnel, in line with the agreement among the political parties, and assisting the implementation of the agreement on this matter in accordance with their understanding.

In his report on this subject, the Secretary-General stated that he had sought clarification from the Government of Nepal regarding whether he should recommend an extension of the special political mission and also regarding the continuation of the Mission's political leadership. On behalf of the Government of Nepal, I have provided our clarification to the Office of the Secretary-General and the Department of Political Affairs. I will read out the clarification that we gave to the Secretary-General regarding the extension of UNMIN's mandate in accordance with our request. There is a slight reordering of the sequence of the points, which I have shared informally with members.

> "The Government's letter sent on 8 July represents the combined position of the major political parties, including the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which is most likely to lead the next government. Even after the formation of the next government, there is virtually no possibility of amending the letter and its contents, which was agreed after intensive political discussion among the political parties.
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> "By way of clarification, the letter dated 8 July from the Permanent Mission of Nepal on the matter clearly states that the Government would like 'to request from the United Nations the continuation of UNMIN on a smaller scale', which means an extension of the special political mission as stipulated in Security Council resolution 1740 (2007). The mission will have to 'engage itself for the remainder of the mandate', which 'relates to the ongoing work of monitoring the management of arms and armed personnel in line with the agreement among the political parties and of assisting in implementing the agreement'. That is obvious, because the rest of the mandate laid out in resolution 1740 (2007) has already been accomplished.
>
> "In view of the further evolution of the situation in the country towards the successive consolidation of the peace process, and the understanding among the political parties that this process should be taken forward to its logical conclusion, as stated in the aforementioned letter, the Government of Nepal would like to assume that the political leadership of the mission will be continued at the level of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, retaining adequate political and administrative staff for the purpose, along with the arms monitors.
>
> "The Government of Nepal agrees with the rest of the staffing and transition arrangements that the Secretary-General proposed in relation to the downsizing of the mission.
>
> "A temporary extension for a month will not be helpful in any way in the transition to the formation of a new government or in the ongoing discussion on matters related to the management of arms and arms personnel among the major political actors.
>
> "The above clarification has also been conveyed to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in his meetings with the political leadership after the Secretary-General sought clarification on the matter. Therefore, the Government of Nepal is in favour of extending the mission as per its request in its letter of 8 July for next six months."

I am pleased to learn that the Secretary-General has now accepted our explanation and authorized his Special Representative to recommend to the Council an extension of UNMIN for another six months, as per our request. I am confident that the Council will lend its support to our request. Listening to the statements made here today, I am confident that our request will be taken into account, as per the recommendation of the Secretary-General.

I am grateful for the sentiments and words of support and encouragement that all speakers expressed in their statements. We have taken note of some of the most important and constructive comments and observations. I take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, and every member of the Council for your continued support and encouragement for the peace process and for your readiness to meet our request in all circumstances.

Since this will be my last opportunity to do so in this format, since I do not expect another extension, I would like to personally thank every ambassador and representative for their readiness to support Nepal even when they had so many other important matters to handle.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for undertaking the onerous effort of coordinating the draft resolution in this regard. I am confident that it will be adopted soon. I would also like to thank the Ambassadors of India and Japan for their readiness to express support in their statements.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Sen (India): At the outset, I thank you, Sir, for scheduling this discussion on the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) and for enabling our delegation to express its views on this matter.

The extent and depth of the India-Nepal bilateral relationship cannot be overemphasized. It is based on ties of history, culture, language, ethnicity, kinship and geography. We enjoy the closest political ties, with close relationships between our political parties and equally close economic and commercial relations. India is also partnering Nepal's development in sectors ranging from energy to agriculture.

Since our two countries share an open border, with open access to each other's markets and privileged access for the citizens of the other country, no country has more to gain from peace, stability and development in Nepal than India. It is for that reason that we have remained closely involved, not only in Nepal, but also in India and at all multilateral forums, through a decade of difficulties as an armed conflict raged, and subsequently as Nepal's leaders and people brought the conflict to a halt and began a peace process to bring closure to that conflict.

Just as the conflict was indigenous, so too is the peace process. All credit should go to the people of Nepal and to the wise and statesmanlike efforts of Nepalese political parties and leaders for bringing about a peace process.

India has strongly supported the peace process in Nepal, the ownership of which is entirely indigenous. We have warmly welcomed every positive step taken by Nepalese stakeholders in a complex and sensitive process, without outside assistance or advice. Against all odds and despite cynicism, the Nepalese people not only maintained the cohesion of the Seven-Party Alliance, but also proceeded to implement their Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Despite delays, Nepalese authorities conducted an extremely successful Constituent Assembly election in April, which was truly a historic moment. Despite facing complex challenges in its peace process, Nepal and its leaders have indigenously addressed each of those. As a close and friendly neighbour, India stands ready to assist in any manner that the leaders and people of Nepal may ask of us.

India has fully supported the United Nations efforts to assist Nepal, at the request of the host Government. We have been in close contact with UNMIN at all levels, including in New Delhi. Our support was never limited to words; we also provided material support at the crucial phase when UNMIN was being established.

Taking into account the current situation on the ground, we fully support Nepal's request, made formally on 8 July, to extend the mandate of UNMIN for a further six months. The letter makes it abundantly clear that some of the mandates relating to the Mission, as laid down in resolution 1740 (2007), have already been accomplished. The request for an extension of six months therefore pertains to the remainder of the original mandate — a clear statement with nothing implied and nothing to be interpreted or clarified. We also note that the request is made on the basis of a consensus between key Nepalese political parties, including the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which has a plurality in the Constituent Assembly. That consensus is also reflected in the 25 June Seven-Party Agreement and is therefore fundamental to the continuation of political processes in Nepal.

From that standpoint, it is difficult to accept parts of the Secretary-General's latest report. Bearing in mind that it is at Nepal's request for assistance on specific aspects of its peace process that UNMIN exists, it seems inappropriate for the Secretary-General to advise the Council to extend the mandate for one month unless Nepal's request is clarified. In other words, unless Nepal's request is in line with what UNMIN wants it to say, the request is not good enough. That could imply that UNMIN would be asking the new Government — whose constituents expressed their views in the 8 July letter — to reinterpret the 25 June Agreement. In doing so, UNMIN could find itself in the unfortunate position of having its role become a matter of contention rather than being seen as a positive contributor to the peace process. It may also be seen to imply that the report is suggesting that political formations that are to form the Government are liable to change their minds. Not only does that run counter to the trend of Nepali political parties abiding by previous commitments, but it is also an extraordinary claim to make, even by implication.

I carefully listened to the excellent statement made by the Permanent Representative of Nepal and, as he made clear, several aspects of the original mandate have been completed. The request is for something on a smaller scale. The clarification of the letter of 8 July essentially reiterates, in a sense, the earlier document, and it is significant that the peace process as a whole does not find mention in that clarification.

Furthermore, the report also suggests in paragraph 64 that UNMIN has "been made aware" of a broad consensus within Nepal that continuation of a United Nations political presence is important to the completion of the peace process. While we would welcome being made similarly aware, what should have weight is not a subjective impression — including through an oral exchange — that the United Nations may have gained, but what the people's elected representatives convey in writing.

To our knowledge, UNMIN's support has not been sought in taking decisions on issues related to the peace process. Indeed, the greatest strength of the peace process is that it has consistently been nationally-owned, directed and implemented. The Nepalese request for United Nations support was with regard to the implementation of aspects of Nepal's peace process — as speakers before me have noted — which required an internationally-accepted monitor. Those included advising the national Election Commission in the conduct of elections and monitoring the management of arms and the forces of the two contending armies. And yet, in paragraph 68, it is asserted that the "key requirement now is not the continuation of monitoring arrangements so much as the transition to a durable and permanent solution". While that may or may not be so, it certainly cannot be automatically assumed that the durability and permanence of arrangements to address the problem of two armed forces depends on the active involvement of the United Nations.

I am constrained to point out that we have noted a consistent effort to expand the definition of what Nepal seeks in terms of support to include a role in the Nepali peace process, irrespective of the desire of Nepalese interlocutors. To insist on playing a role that the host nation is reluctant to provide is to risk jeopardizing the work of UNMIN thus far. That should be avoided at all costs, as it could undermine the United Nations investment in Nepal — not the other way around.

In that context, the Council must also seriously consider whether to permit a liberal interpretation of the principle of the sanctity of a State's requests for specific assistance. We often hear the counter-argument that it is for the Council to decide on what action is appropriate in each case, but not when parallels are drawn between Nepal and other issues on the agenda of the Council. Let us not forget that Nepal approached the United Nations for assistance of its own free will, not because the situation in that country was a threat to international peace and security.

We therefore urge the Council to accept the Nepalese request, as contained in its letter of 8 July 2008, in letter and spirit. To put it directly, the continuation of UNMIN on a smaller scale to engage in the remainder of the mandate for a period of six months is what Nepal has sought. It is precisely what Nepal should get — no more, no less.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I wish to thank Mr. Ian Martin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), for his dedicated work and his comprehensive briefing this morning.

I would like first to congratulate the people and Government of Nepal on their efforts in conducting the successful election for the Constituent Assembly in April. Credit for that success goes to the people themselves, but UNMIN and the international community also played a very helpful and indispensable role. Japan joined other partners in sending 24 electoral observers and two parliamentarians to support that historic election and to serve as witnesses to the new democratic governance process in Nepal.

At the first session of the Constituent Assembly, Nepal declared itself a federal democratic republic. We commend all the parties who respected the will of the people and carried out the transition in a peaceful manner. The parties are now engaged in consultations to formulate a new Government. That process of political dialogue among all parties reflects the sound state of the nation's new democracy.

We are also pleased to note that the political dialogue among the parties is proceeding peacefully. The people have proven their wisdom by demonstrating that political differences can be addressed through dialogue without resorting to violence. We strongly urge all the Nepalese people to maintain that strong momentum towards democratic governance and to refrain from any type of violence.

We also highly appreciate the good offices efforts made by Special Representative Martin, who, working within his mandate, has spared no effort to move the political process forward during this process.

We understand that Nepal needs some more time to consider the future of the soldiers in cantonment, which is a cornerstone to consolidating durable peace. As this is a critical time in achieving lasting peace and stability in the country, Japan supports the extension of the mandate of UNMIN for six months, in line with the request of the Government of Nepal. The arms monitors, including those from Japan, have ably carried out their duties. I am convinced that arms monitoring will be effectively conducted under the extended mandate. At the same time, the United Nations cannot continue to monitor arms and soldiers indefinitely. We therefore strongly urge the parties to come to an agreement on the future status of their army as soon as possible, while the United Nations Mission continues to monitor the activities for a limited extended period.

As a peace-fostering nation, Japan is firmly committed to supporting Nepal's peacebuilding efforts to consolidate peace and democracy. Mr. Osamu Uno, Japan's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, visited Nepal two days ago to convey Japan's commitment. As part of our support, in cooperation with UNICEF, we will address the issue of child soldiers and promote the development of socio-economic infrastructure and the reduction of poverty throughout the country.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.

United Nations

S/PV.5939

Security Council

Distr.: General
21 July 2008

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 5939th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 21 July 2008, at 4.05 p.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

> "At its 5939th meeting, held in private on 21 July 2008, the Security Council considered the item entitled 'The situation in Georgia'.
>
> "The President, with the consent of the Council, invited the representatives of Australia, Azerbaijan, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Georgia, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.
>
> "Members of the Council and the representative of Georgia had an exchange of views."

United Nations S/PV.5940

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5940th meeting

Tuesday, 22 July 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Le Luong Minh	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Mubarak
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Argentina, Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Qatar and the Syrian Arab Republic, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 18 July 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2008/473 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council which will be held on Tuesday, 22 July 2008, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 15 July 2008 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, representative of Senegal, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Badji (Senegal) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Pascoe: During a month that saw a number of encouraging developments across the Middle East, we are particularly heartened by the progress in Lebanon, where a major step forward was taken with the announcement of a national unity Government. It is also positive that the indirect talks between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continue. In Gaza, the ceasefire has held and there was a marked decline in violence. We are concerned, however, about the lack of improvement in the situation on the ground in the West Bank.

The political process begun at Annapolis continues, with regular meetings and discussions of the core issues taking place at various levels, both in the region and elsewhere. Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas held a meeting on the margins of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean on 13 July. They underscored their determination to make progress and reach an agreement. However, some significant gaps reportedly remain, and in discussions with Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in Paris, the Secretary-General emphasized the need to press ahead with bilateral talks with the goal of overcoming all outstanding differences. It is nevertheless encouraging that today, for the first time, Israeli President Peres hosted President Abbas in his residence in Jerusalem.

In Gaza and Israel, the security situation has improved, as the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire that entered into effect last month has generally been upheld. During the reporting period, one Palestinian civilian was killed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) near the Gaza-Israel border, and two others were injured. Palestinian militants fired 7 rockets and 10 mortars at Israel, which resulted in no casualties. No IDF air strikes or incursions were reported. Hamas is communicating to the public in Gaza its support for the calm and has detained individuals involved in firing mortars. However, 9 Palestinians were killed and 29 injured by internal violence, reckless handling of weaponry and tunnel collapses along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Building on the ceasefire, Egypt continues to work on an agreement to exchange the captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, for a number of Palestinian prisoners currently held by Israel. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has still not been provided with access to Corporal Shalit after more than two years in captivity.

I am pleased to report that the number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip through the Sufa and Karni crossings increased by 54 per cent during the four weeks following the ceasefire, as compared to the month before. Imports of cement increased substantially and met Gazan requirements for the reporting period. There has generally been a slight increase in the import of non-food commodities. We welcome that improvement, but note that current import levels stand at approximately 30 per cent of the level before June 2007. The continued lack of many raw materials and the prohibition against exports preclude any significant economic recovery. Approximately 95 per cent of local industrial establishments remain closed.

On 17 July, Israeli officials informed their counterparts in the Palestinian Authority that they would increase the amount of fuel being allowed into Gaza. That is encouraging and necessary, as the amount of fuel has remained substantially lower than the actual needs. Between 27 June and 20 July, only 17 per cent of daily needs of petrol, 57 per cent of diesel, 40 per cent of cooking gas and 81 per cent of industrial gas requirements were met. The Gaza Electricity Company continues to operate at less than 70 per cent of its full capacity. The hardships caused by that policy have been reported in past briefings.

United Nations Special Coordinator Serry visited the Gaza Strip on 10 July to explore suitable ways to resume stalled projects, including United Nations projects, as requested by the Quartet. The United Nations has asked the Government of Israel to facilitate the resumption of priority projects as a matter of urgency, and Prime Minister Olmert, in his discussions with the Secretary-General, has undertaken to consider that matter carefully.

President Abbas continued wide-ranging consultations on the basis of his 5 June speech, which called for national dialogue to implement the Yemeni initiative. Both the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator Serry have underlined their support for President Abbas' initiative for progress towards the goal of reunification of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The members of the League of Arab States will have a leading role to play in facilitating such efforts.

As efforts continue to solidify the ceasefire in Gaza, it is critical to accelerate progress on the ground in the West Bank. In this connection, we note with concern that Israeli forces have stepped up their military operations throughout the West Bank since 19 June. The IDF closed down and seized equipment of alleged Hamas-affiliated institutions in Nablus, including schools, medical centres, media outlets and civic associations. Israel has outlawed 36 international non-governmental organizations, charging them with fundraising for Hamas. Israeli troops raided the Nablus municipality, arrested elected Palestinian Authority officials and ordered the closure of Nablus' main shopping mall.

Palestinian Authority officials, including Prime Minister Fayyad, have criticized those operations as undermining the economy and the Authority's efforts to improve security in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces have continued their efforts to impose law and order and to disarm and arrest militants, in compliance with Palestinian obligations under phase I of the Road Map. We are concerned about the effects of Israeli raids on the efforts of Palestinian security forces to operate effectively in areas under their control.

On 2 July, three Israeli civilians, including two women, were killed and 30 others injured, when a Palestinian from East Jerusalem used a bulldozer to attack vehicles in West Jerusalem. The Secretary-General condemned that attack. This morning, as I am sure the Council is aware, a similar attack took place again, resulting in the injury of two Israelis.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, three Palestinians, including one civilian, were killed by the IDF, and 136 others were injured, including at least 22 children. Most of the injuries occurred during anti-barrier demonstrations and were caused by rubber bullets and tear gas. On three occasions since mid-June, Israeli settlers are reported to have fired a total of six rockets towards the Palestinian villages of Burin, southwest of Nablus. On 12 July, Israeli police arrested a settler suspected of manufacturing and launching those projectiles and seized explosives and weapons in the settlement of Yizhar. Subsequently, on 21 July, another rocket was fired from the settlement.

Construction activity in Israeli settlements across the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, has continued in the reporting period, and on 3 July, it was reported that Defense Minister Ehud Barak had approved construction for a new building in the Beit Romano settlement in Hebron's old city.

As the Secretary-General has stressed many times before, Israeli construction in settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to international law and contrary to Israel's commitments under the Road Map and the Annapolis process. He urges Israel to heed the clear call of the Quartet to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001.

Across the West Bank, a slight deterioration in movement and access has been observed, at a time when we had hoped for improvement. Four significant obstacles that had been removed during June were reinstalled by the IDF in July, bringing the total number of closure obstacles to 609. In addition, Israel is renovating the Wadi Nar or Container checkpoint, controlling movement from the north to the southern part of the West Bank, rather than honouring its prior commitment to remove it.

A recent report by the Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs confirmed that 56 per cent of the planned route of the barrier has now been constructed. The majority of the construction deviates from the Green Line and is therefore contrary to the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The report found that only 20 per cent of farmers in the northern West Bank, who used to farm their land west of the barrier, are being issued permits by the Israeli authorities to access their land. This increases dependency on food and humanitarian assistance and it is undermining livelihoods as well.

Let me turn now to the Palestinian economic situation. Owing to budget shortfalls this month, the Palestinian Authority barely managed to make salary payments for June. It plans to pay July salaries through loans and donor aid, but will need an additional $600 million in order to stay solvent from August through December — excluding aid for development projects. We urge all donors who have not yet fulfilled their pledges at the December 2007 donors' conference to provide budget support in order to avert a financial crisis.

The Chair of the Paris Conference, France, and the three co-chairs, Norway, the European Commission and the Quartet representative, met on 7 July to discuss developments since the donor conference in December 2007. A meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee is scheduled to be held in September on the margins of the General Assembly.

Another round of indirect talks between Syria and Israel, mediated by Turkey, is expected later this month and will be followed by further talks in August. The Secretary-General expressed his appreciation for Turkey's efforts and his support for these talks in his meetings with Prime Minister Erdogan, President Assad and Prime Minister Olmert in Paris.

Special Coordinator Serry visited Damascus and underlined United Nations support for the important efforts on this track. The Government of Syria raised the issue of prisoners from the occupied Syrian Golan with Mr. Serry and I note here the release from Israeli custody of Sitan Al-Wali on 8 July. The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained quiet through the reporting period, although settlement activity continues.

Yesterday Syrian Foreign Minister Mouallem arrived in Beirut, where he handed over to Lebanese President Michel Sleiman an official invitation to visit Syria. We urge both countries to establish full diplomatic relations and representation, consistent with Security Council resolution 1680 (2006).

As for Lebanon, we applaud the major step forward taken on 11 July, when President Sleiman announced that agreement had been reached on the composition of the national unity cabinet, subject to a vote of confidence in Parliament in the coming weeks. The Secretary-General welcomed this development and reiterated his call upon all parties to continue to work towards the full implementation of the Doha Accord. The United Nations looks forward to working closely with the new Government.

An important achievement of the reporting period was the implementation of the major humanitarian aspects of resolution 1701 (2006). On 16 July, the bodies of the two abducted soldiers were returned to Israel, in exchange for Lebanese detainees and remains. The Secretary-General's Facilitator has worked with great perseverance for almost two years and will be submitting a full report to the Secretary-General in the coming period.

As you are aware, the Secretary-General has received letters from the Government of Israel and from Hizbullah, committing themselves to further humanitarian action. The Secretary-General will continue to keep the Council informed of these and other developments.

A number of security incidents occurred in and around the northern city of Tripoli and other parts of the country during the reporting period. We are concerned about these clashes and the implication they have for the stability and security of Lebanon. We welcome steps taken by the Lebanese authorities to improve security around Tripoli.

Since the last Security Council briefing, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) area of operations has remained generally quiet. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Command has not yet returned the army units that it redeployed out of the area of operations in May, due to the security situation in other parts of the country. The UNIFIL Force Commander has called on the LAF Command to return those units as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, UNIFIL and the LAF are working to ensure that the shortage of units does not adversely affect their ability to carry out their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006).

Over the reporting period, UNIFIL has continued to record significant numbers of Israeli air violations, which have occurred on an almost daily basis. We again urge Israel to cease these violations.

The reduction of violence in Gaza is a significant, but fragile, achievement. We hope that this calm can be sustained and, together with internal Palestinian dialogue, lead to other positive steps: the return of the legitimate Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip, the reopening of the crossings, the release of Gilad Shalit and a number of Palestinian prisoners and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority on a basis that allows the peace process to move forward.

We are encouraged by the determination of the parties to continue negotiations within the Annapolis framework, and by the active role of the United States and other members of the international community. The Quartet will meet in September here in New York and in the period between now and then it is important that progress continue. It is vital that there are visible improvements in the situation on the ground, in the consolidation of the ceasefire in Gaza and in improved conditions in the West Bank.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the Secretary-General remains committed to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine.

Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you and your country, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on your presidency of the Security Council this month, affirming our confidence in your ability to wisely guide the Council's important work.

I also express our thanks to the United States of America for its able stewardship of the Council in June.

We also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Pascoe, for his briefing today.

The Middle East peace process, which was begun 17 years ago in Madrid on the basis of United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, was launched officially between the Palestinian and Israeli sides 15 years ago in Washington with the signing of the Oslo accords, and renewed once again with much hope last November in Annapolis after a bitter seven year freeze — this process, even in the most benign assessment, is in a state of disrepair. That is so because the entire premise of the peace process is being incessantly undermined by the illegal actions of Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, actions that are totally contrary to the principle of land for peace and the objective of achieving a just, lasting and peaceful settlement based on a two-State solution.

Despite many resolutions, agreements and initiatives undertaken over the years to sustain and salvage the peace process, Israel's deliberate actions continue to harm the peace process, preventing that process from overcoming the serious obstacles on the path to achievement of its goals.

The main obstruction has been Israel's illegal settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as in the occupied Syrian Golan, by which Israel has, for over 41 years, been aggressively colonizing the land it forcibly occupied in 1967 in grave breach of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which absolutely prohibits the transfer by the occupying Power of its civilian population into the territory it occupies.

In the occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel's settlement campaign has aimed at creating unilateral facts on the ground and illegally altering the demographic composition, status and character of the territory, in order to facilitate the de facto annexation of large areas of land, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem. As such, this colonization represents the primary danger to the realization by the Palestinian people of their inalienable and national rights and the achievement of the two-State solution with an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders. Indeed, the settlements issue is not only one of the final status issues in the peace process, but is also intricately related to and at the crux of nearly all other final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, water and security, and continues to complicate efforts to justly resolve all of these issues.

Israeli settlement activities have been relentless, in spite of the United Nations resolutions demanding cessation of all settlement activities and the dismantlement of the settlements, in spite of the calls by the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention for Israel to respect the Convention and abide by its legal obligations, and in spite of the fact that the cornerstone of the Road Map is Israel's obligation to freeze all settlement activity and to dismantle settlement outposts.

Israel remains defiant against the will and calls of the international community and continues its illegal settlement activities, imposing more facts on the ground to advance its land grab, with settlement activities especially intense in occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, in the recent period. It is a blatant situation of acquisition of territory by force, driven by Israel's expansionist agenda, which has prolonged the occupation and stood in the way of all peacemaking efforts.

This massive colonization campaign has been carried out through the vast confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers and construction of the wall, which is directly linked to the settlements and intended to protect them and facilitate their expansion and annexation, as well as by numerous other illegal measures.

In this regard, we recall that this month marked the four-year anniversary of the landmark Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian Territory. The Court affirmed the illegality of the wall, which is being constructed deep in the Palestinian territory in deviation from the 1967 Green Line, as well as the illegality of its associated regime, and called upon Israel to cease construction of the wall, to dismantle it and to make reparations for all damage caused by it.

The wall is part and parcel of Israel's colonization attempts, and that was recognized by the

Court, which concluded, inter alia, that the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian Territory have been established in breach of international law and that

> "the route chosen for the wall gives expression in loco to the illegal measures taken by Israel with regard to Jerusalem and the settlements, as deplored by the Security Council"
>
> (A/ES-10/273, 13 July 2004, para. 122).

Taken together, the 150 Israeli settlements, the more than 100 settlement outposts, the extensive labyrinth of Israeli-only bypass roads connecting the settlements to each other and to Israel itself, and the wall, which is projected to be more than twice the length of the 1967 Green Line, occupy huge swaths of Palestinian land, including areas with water and other natural resources, totalling approximately 50 per cent of the occupied West Bank.

This vast colonial network, along with the more than 600 Israeli checkpoints erected to completely restrict Palestinian movement, has created a situation on the ground whereby Palestinian communities have been separated, with many transformed into walled cantons and some destroyed in their entirety, causing the displacement of thousands of Palestinian civilians. East Jerusalem is being isolated from the rest of the Palestinian territory, which is being dissected into northern, central and southern parts. In other words, economic and social devastation is being imposed on the Palestinian people.

The overall result is the severe fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian Territory and the undermining of its contiguity, integrity and unity. The entrenchment and continuation of this illegitimate situation will make physically impossible the establishment of a sovereign, contiguous, viable and independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the ultimate realization of the two-State solution for peace in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), by which the Council endorsed the Quartet Road Map.

The situation in the rest of the occupied Palestinian Territory, namely the Gaza Strip, also remains critical. Israel's siege of Gaza has surpassed one year, and the occupying Power continues to impose a suffocating closure of border crossings, obstructing the movement of persons and goods, in collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population there.

Poverty and hardships continue to rise as a result of declining socio-economic conditions. Health conditions continue to deteriorate owing to inadequate medical and food supplies as well as the breakdown of sewage and sanitation systems because of lack of spare parts and fuel. And, the continuing fuel crisis has disrupted all sectors of life and has even disrupted United Nations operations in Gaza. Moreover, this deliberately imposed humanitarian crisis is only worsening with the globally rising food and fuel prices affecting the whole international community.

At the same time, the Israeli occupying forces continue to carry out violent military raids and attacks in the occupied Palestinian Territory. As a result, Palestinian civilians, including children, continue to be killed, injured, detained and arrested, and Palestinian homes, property and infrastructure continue to be destroyed. We call for an immediate end to such illegal, deplorable actions and call on Israel instead to abide by its legal obligations and its commitments in order to create an environment actually conducive to the pursuit of peace.

In this connection, I wish to refer to the truce agreement reached as a result of the intensive, commendable efforts undertaken by the Government of Egypt. The truce took effect in the Gaza Strip on 19 June and continues to be upheld despite several infractions. President Abbas continues to appeal for respect of the truce on both sides and continues to call as well for extension of the truce to the West Bank. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip constitute one geopolitical unit — the occupied Palestinian territory — and, accordingly, Israeli military attacks in either area affect the other negatively. As we have witnessed repeatedly, reckless and violent Israeli actions similar to the raids and killings in Nablus shortly after the truce began in June have in the past undercut attempts to bring about a cessation of violence, sabotaged Palestinian Authority efforts to promote law and order, harmed peace negotiations and fuelled the deadly cycle of violence.

Nevertheless, we reaffirm our hope that the truce will hold, that calm will prevail and that the occupying Power will completely lift the siege of Gaza and allow for the movement of persons and goods to ease the isolation and humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian civilian population.

In that regard, we reiterate the Palestinian Authority's readiness to assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of Gaza's border crossings and call upon Israel to allow for the opening of the crossings in line with the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

In 2008, despite the investment of so much hope, energy and effort in the peace process, we are still witness to the perpetuation of the longest military occupation in contemporary history, the active colonization of occupied land in violation of international law and United Nations resolutions, and the continued denial and violation of the inalienable human rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and the right of the Palestine refugees to return. All attempts to rectify that unjust situation have been impeded by Israel's continuing illegal practices, and real progress has been elusive. The situation continues to decline and the opportunities for peace continue to be undermined.

That is why we have continued to appeal to the international community to address the critical issues before us, and why we specifically returned to the Council, imploring it to uphold its responsibilities under the Charter and international law, particularly with regard to the illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. That is a matter of international peace and security, for the continuation of that illegal situation is not only obstructing the peace process but is seriously harming it, endangering the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and consequently the future prospects for peace and stability in the Middle East region and beyond.

The United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects, including a just resolution for the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The Council should not be exempt from its responsibilities in that regard, and here we emphasize the importance of the role of the caucus of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries as a voice for the 118 countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement, including Palestine, in the Council.

If the Council remains unable to bear its responsibilities vis-à-vis the question of Palestine in the face of flagrant breaches, its credibility will be undermined. Moreover, it will continue negatively to affect the image of the United Nations and feed the perception of double standards held by those in the Middle East and the developing world, a conclusion borne out by several assessments, including the latest investigation by an independent panel.

In our international community, alliances should be made in favour of international law and not against it. Unlawful actions should be confronted and not tolerated or excused. If the latter options are chosen, justice and peace, and their associated benefits of security, stability, prosperity and development, can never be truly realized, and the rule of law and the foundations of our international system will continue to be gravely weakened. Such an outcome must be avoided at all costs.

Accordingly, despite our deep disappointment and frustration, we have not lost hope and will continue to call on the international community, including the Council, to uphold international law towards the promotion of a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. Moreover, we reaffirm in this forum the continued commitment of the Palestinian side to the peace process, according to its agreed terms of reference, as the means to bring an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, to achieve a just, lasting and peaceful settlement, and to realize the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine.

The President: I thank the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine for her kind words on Viet Nam's presidency of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Thank you, Sir, for your able stewardship of the Council this month. I also wish to thank the Mission of the United States for their very able leadership of the Council last month and Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his customarily comprehensive briefing.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express to the Secretary-General our great admiration for his leadership, integrity and compassion in dealing with the very delicate effort concerning the release our two boys, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. In spite of the sad closure of that chapter, we are very grateful to the Secretary-General for his efforts, both personally and through his mediator, to bring it to a close. We realize how compassionate he was about it, and we are, both as a State and personally speaking on behalf of the families, eternally grateful to him.

I have prepared a speech for this meeting, Sir, which I will submit to you and ask you to read, because some very good people have worked very hard on it, and it is, I think, a very good speech that I think should be read by everybody. But, as this is most probably my last appearance before the Council as Permanent Representative of the State of Israel, I would like to take the liberty to speak to the Council from the heart rather than from the written word.

I would like to start by thanking everyone here, each and every representative — Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives, members of the Council and other Ambassadors — for the time and the energy that everyone has spent on, among other issues, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and our problems. Throughout, many representatives have shown great integrity and great leadership. Many representatives have spent much time and energy on a conflict that to so many of them is so far away. But I would like truly to express my appreciation for what has been over the years a true demonstration of care, compassion, intelligence and integrity by very many.

I would also like to share with the Council what it is like and what it feels like to represent Israel at the United Nations and around this table. One of the first things I would like to point out is that I am afraid that many of those present have not been to Israel, and I think that whatever words I use and whatever descriptions I give will never fully bring to the awareness of the world, or even of those present, what an incredible country Israel truly is.

I invite each and every representative here — some representatives have been invited and have not yet been able to make the journey — to come to Israel. Everyone will see a country that is very different from the perception he sees on the television screens, from the perception he gets from watching cable networks, where one sees only a country that seems to be a place torn by violence and bloodshed. Everyone will discover a very vibrant country of great excellence and innovation, where young people go about their lives enjoying themselves, while contributing to the country and to the world. Everyone will see a country that has contributed and is contributing each and every day to mankind and to humanity, not just to itself and the Jewish people, by making deserts bloom with its agriculture, by making limbs move with its medicine, and by making the world a better place each and every day with its innovations, patents, creativity and excellence, and indeed a richer place with its art and its culture. I would urge everyone here to come and see for themselves because, as with many other countries, one can never understand what Israel is really like unless one touches it and smells it and feels it. We urge everyone to come and visit.

But I would also like everyone here, for one moment, to imagine — to imagine what it is like to be an Israeli. Imagine being a grandfather like me, who sometimes goes to the kindergarten to pick up his young grandchild and whose heart breaks when he sees the armed guard in front of that kindergarten and for a moment is not sure whether he will live to see the moment when he will embrace his grandchild alive. Imagine what it is to embark on a bus and look around in fear, not knowing whether that bus will reach its destination or blow up. Imagine what it is like to sit in a café in Jerusalem and to realize that, while a coffee on the Champs-Elysées or in the Pushkin Café in Moscow or right here in New York may cost $2 or $3, a coffee in Jerusalem could cost many, many lives. Imagine being a mother in Sderot whose children wet their beds every night out of fear and who, when she comes to collect them from school, is not sure they will be there.

Imagine. Imagine what it is like this morning to drive on the main street of Jerusalem and have a bulldozer turn over cars and crush them. Imagine being on Fifth Avenue or Oxford Street or the Champs-Elysées and seeing a bulldozer overturning buses and crushing cars with their occupants inside. Imagine that reality. Imagine the terror we face and the fear we live with each and every day, and try to understand what it is like to be an Israeli.

Now, I have been here for nearly six years. I have sat here many, many times, and I have often been accused by some of my colleagues of overreacting, overdramatizing and being oversensitive. But if those present here were to come to Israel, or even just to imagine being there, they would understand that, while to many what we are dealing with — including in these quarterly meetings — is a technicality and something that is happening far, far away, to us it is everyday life. To us, it is not just statistics and numbers. To us, it is indeed human faces, living faces and, unfortunately all too often, dead bodies.

I will be leaving here with a sense of achievement, because we and Israel have had some very memorable achievements at the United Nations over the years, but also with some sense of frustration. Represented around this table are many countries that mean well and are here because they want to make a difference. I truly believe that each and every representative around this table is here because he or she wants to make the world a better place for our children and for our grandchildren. Most are here because they care; most are here to make a difference. In that, I include my Palestinian colleague Riyad Mansour, who is not here. I truly believe that, when he speaks and when he is here, he cares very deeply about his people and wants to see their aspirations and their dreams realized. We may have had our differences, but they were always out of caring and doing the right thing.

I can, unfortunately, not say that about every single member of the Council, because we do have a member whose main aim is to block any reasonable resolution and any mention or any condemnation of terror. I think that that reality should be considered very carefully when we next come to elect members to the Security Council. I think the standards should be higher and the considerations should be deeper.

We are dealing with terror every day, and we have seen a new manifestation of terror only a few hours ago in Jerusalem. A few yards away from where President Peres was having lunch in his residence with President Abbas, another terrorist used a bulldozer as a death machine, trying to kill as many people as he could. That is the second time this has happened. When it happened the first time, people thought it was a just a crazy man doing something crazy. Now, it is becoming a pattern and we are seeing yet another contribution from those people whom one member of this Council totally supports. That member supports terrorism.

When I look around this table, I see people representing countries that gave the world great Asian art; that gave the world Emile Zola and Hector Berlioz; that gave the world alternative medicine; that gave the world Breughel; that gave the world Benjamin Franklin, the Declaration of Independence, Albert Einstein and Leonard Bernstein; that gave the world Thomas Moore and Benjamin Britten; that gave the world Dostoyevsky and Tchaikovsky; that gave the world Verdi; and that have given the world, among other things, Nelson Mandela.

What are the contributions of those terrorists to our world? Their biggest inventions and most advanced exports are airplane hijackings, hostage-takings, suicide bombings and, indeed now, using bulldozers as death machines. I would ask those here, when they next talk about the Middle East, discuss the situation there and talk about Israel, to think about that and to think about what we are dealing with each and every day. I wonder what they will think of next.

But what I would ask and urge those here to do is to think of the world we live in. We are here to really deal with the real problems of the world we live in. We are, each and every one of us, here to make a difference. We are here to make the world a safer and better place. But what we are truly witnessing today is no longer a clash of civilizations. We are indeed witnessing a clash of civilization, in the singular, because most of the horror, most of the bloodshed, most of the killing and most of the violence, sadly and tragically, is within Islam.

Not only is the vast majority of terrorists Muslim, but sadly and tragically, the vast majority of victims is Muslim. Each and every day, Muslims are being killed by Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Morocco, Sharm el-Sheikh and Amman. What is the most frightening thing to me is the eerie silence of the Muslim world, the fact that we do not see in this Council or in the world a Muslim leader — be he secular, religious, political or academic — getting up to say "Enough is enough. What are we doing?"

I hope very much that such a leader will emerge, and I hope very much that the Arab and Muslim world will realize that it is its duty and responsibility today, in that very clash, to support the moderates and to isolate and marginalize the extremists, because that is indeed what we are witnessing: a horrible clash between moderates and extremists. Nowhere is that illustrated more starkly than in Iran, where there is a President who denies the Holocaust while preparing the next one and who calls for wiping another Member State of this Organization off the face of the map.

I think that much of the Arab world and the Muslim world, as I witnessed first-hand in Annapolis, realizes where the real threat is. It is up to them to stand up today for what is right, to support and legitimize a moderate Palestinian leadership, and to tell those leaders that if they go for a fair and long-lasting settlement the Arab and Muslim world will stand by them, legitimize them and support them. I believe that this is also the solemn duty of the Security Council: to support the talks on the ground between the moderate and democratically elected leadership of the Palestinians and the Israeli leadership, and to let the parties reach an agreement which — hopefully very, very soon — will bring an end to the cycle of violence and make our two peoples live side by side in peace, security and prosperity.

I believe it will happen. I am saddened by the fact that it will not happen during my tenure, but my wish for my successor is that it may happen on her watch.

In the meantime, I want once again to thank members for their comradeship, for their collegiality, for their understanding, for their compassion, for their leadership and for their integrity. It has been an honour for me to serve with them, and I want on this very special occasion to make one more pledge: whatever happens, whatever the Council discusses, whatever transpires, Israel will prevail, because a country that has given the world the Weitzmann Institute, Hebrew University and the Israel Philharmonic can do no less. Thank you very much, and goodbye.

The President: I thank the representative of Israel for his kind words about Viet Nam's presidency of the Security Council.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I should like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Speakers with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in the Chamber and to deliver a condensed version when speaking.

Mr. Mubarak (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories remains the same. More than a month after the ceasefire agreement between Palestinian factions and the Zionist occupying forces — which came about as a result of the efforts of Egypt and which entered into force on 19 June — the situation at crossing points remains one of closure and only partial opening. That is in contravention of the occupying forces' commitment to the declared period of calm. Israeli forces continue to assassinate Palestinian activists in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which reflects the persistent attempt by the occupying authorities to put an end to this temporary ceasefire.

Such partial openings of crossing points should not be understood as a concession by the occupying Power: they are a commitment of the Israeli occupying forces under international law and human rights law. The occupying Power's policy of collective punishment has been described in this Chamber by the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretaries-General for Political Affairs and for Humanitarian Affairs as a crime under international law and humanitarian law, and it is considered to be a crime of genocide under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which the Council discussed two days ago. A number of other international officials and international organizations have also spoken out, most recently the European Commission, which has called for the siege on Gaza to be lifted.

The activities undertaken by the Israeli authorities following the Annapolis Conference, in particular their continued construction of settlements, leave no doubt that they are not serious about attaining a permanent, just and comprehensive solution to the situation in the region. All those activities not only impede the peace process, but also endanger the concept of a two-State solution.

Despite all the requests, exhortations and appeals to the occupying Power to halt the construction of settlements, the occupying authorities continue daily to issue new permits for the construction of new settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. They are also entrenching the settlements by continuing to build the apartheid separation wall, in spite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. There is evidently international paralysis in the face of this expansion of the settlements, which has resulted in the seizure of 76 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Security Council's inability to express its will on the settlements, which the international community has unequivocally rejected, calls for a review of the Council's working methods and its machinery. It is legally and morally unacceptable for some States to prevent the Council from shouldering its responsibilities on this issue. There is injustice in the unequal treatment accorded to a people under occupation and an occupying Power that is daily violating its obligations as an occupying Power.

For more than a month, the Arab Group has been making intensive efforts to bring about a Security Council resolution to address the issue of settlements as an impediment to progress in the peace negotiations and to address the illegal actions undertaken by the occupying Power in contravention of all international norms and agreements, which have been condemned by all international and regional parties. Regrettably, however, that endeavour has met with paralysis and flimsy justifications and pretexts aimed at using the Middle East problem as a way to impose a solution that will protect the occupying Power and metes out unjust treatment to the victim. That is not the proper stance for an impartial mediator to take.

My delegation stresses the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation. That right is recognized under all international norms and laws. My country completely rejects any linkage between resistance to occupation and terrorism. Real terrorism is the confiscation of Palestinian property, the continued killing of Palestinian leaders and activists and the siege imposed on 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Real terrorism is more than 60 years of forced displacement of Palestinians and of not permitting them to return to their homes. Real terrorism is the detention without trial of 11,000 Palestinians, some of them children, old people, women or members of the Palestinian Legislative Council — and when there is a trial, it is usually unfair and a mere formality.

My delegation is astonished by the suggestion by some that it is futile for the Council to discuss a question as important as that of the Middle East. Perhaps such comments will help us to understand why the Council is unable to shoulder its responsibility on this issue and to understand the paralysis and lack of credibility resulting from the abuse of authority and the double standards used in addressing the question of the Middle East.

Turning to Lebanon, my delegation has consistently emphasized non-intervention in Lebanese affairs. Such intervention leads to crisis rather than helping the Lebanese parties to achieve reconciliation. When, in Doha, the Lebanese were offered the opportunity, they succeeded in emerging from the political crisis that Lebanon had faced for more than a year and a half. We welcome the positive developments in Lebanon following the Doha agreement, the developments in Syrian-Lebanese relations, and the return of Lebanese prisoners of war from Israel.

But despite those positive developments, Lebanon still faces daily violations of its airspace and borders. The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2008/425) notes an unprecedented increase in the number of Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace since February, reaching 72 in a single day.

Israel, the occupying Power, continues to occupy the Shaba'a farms and the Lebanese village of al-Ghajar. It has failed to respond to the appeals of the Secretary-General and his representatives or to the requests by the forces of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to present maps showing the locations of mines, explosive devices and cluster munitions, which, as emphasized in the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/425), cover 49 per cent of the surface area of southern Lebanon. All of these acts, including the daily violations, the continued occupation of Lebanese territory and the non-response to efforts to determine the locations of mines and other remnants of war are in flagrant violation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The occupied Syrian Golan continues to be subjected to the Israeli settlements policy, which has been in effect since 1967. Despite Syria's announcement and emphasis on the fact that peace is its strategic option and that it is prepared to negotiate without conditions, and despite the many resolutions declaring the annexation of the Golan null and void and without any legal basis, the occupying Power continues its expansionist settlement policy in the occupied Syrian Golan. The recent announcement by the Israeli Knesset that it will not give up the occupied Syrian Golan except through a general referendum reflects the utmost arrogance and constitutes blackmail and the seizure of others' lands.

A few minutes ago, we heard the representative of the Israeli entity present a tourism promotion in the Security Council, as if the Council were a travel agency. I believe that his propaganda was inspired by what we saw a couple of days ago on television: photos of a young Palestinian, blindfolded and handcuffed, who had been shot by Israeli soldiers. Those photos were actually provided by the Israeli entity. That propaganda should make us think twice about accepting the revolting invitation to visit the Israeli entity. We want the representative of the Israeli entity to respond to the appeals of the Security Council, and those contained in the relevant resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council, to permit observers to see what is actually happening in the Palestinian refugee camps. I believe that, instead of making statements concerning Libya's conduct, the representative should improve the conduct of his own country, which is based on terrorism. I do not wish to take up the Council's time by listing the terrorist acts committed by the State called Israel since its establishment. We thank God that that was the last statement to be made by the representative of that country in the Council.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): We thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for having briefed us on the situation in the Middle East within the framework of the regular consideration of this item by the Security Council. We also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Palestine and Israel, and we take due note of their respective statements.

Since the Council's most recent meeting on this important issue, many events have occurred. The most meaningful of these are, in our view, the following. First, there was the recent formation of a new Lebanese Government. We hope that it will strive to put an end to the country's internal political difficulties, so that Lebanon can immediately undertake national reconstruction. Then, there was the exchange of prisoners and remains, which took place on 15 July between Israel and Hizbullah. More than symbols, those signs of détente and even rapprochement show that dialogue is possible, just as peace is, if there is goodwill on both sides. Therefore, the international community should encourage this easing of tension, which is undoubtedly a positive step towards peace.

With regard to the specific case of Syrian-Lebanese relations, we are impatient to familiarize ourselves with the report of the United Nations team of experts on Lebanon, which should keep us abreast of the progress made. Already, however, we must welcome the positive attitudes of both countries towards establishing diplomatic relations. Such an event would be a historic turning point in the relations between the two States. Such a normalization, so long awaited by the international community, would undoubtedly be a decisive step in settling the Lebanese crisis, at least, it being understood that, if there is to be a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East issue, there must be a normalization of relations among all the parties concerned.

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is important that the Palestinian Authority and Israel continue their negotiations, guided by the objectives defined by the Annapolis process and the Quartet's Road Map. The latest news that we have, which we welcome, is of the meeting in Jerusalem between the President of the Palestinian Authority and the President of the State of Israel. We have always said that a settlement of the dispute requires that the belligerent parties fairly share duties, obligations and responsibilities.

It is the duty of Israel to put an end to the settlements policy and to any other activities that could jeopardize the progress currently being made in the bilateral negotiations. In the view of the Palestinian side, the problem of land is the primary obstacle. At the same time, Israel must take all possible measures to fully lift the siege against Gaza and permit the humanitarian issue to be resolved once and for all. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority must also strive to honour its commitments aimed at guaranteeing absolute security for Israel, particularly as regards the firing of rockets against Israeli populations.

It is clear that, while the sharing of responsibilities regarding the Middle East is incumbent primarily on the parties directly affected, the international community must also do its part. First are the countries of the region. Whether through individual initiatives, such as those of Turkey, Qatar and Egypt, or through the actions of regional organizations, such as the Arab peace plan, their role is decisive, and the truce currently in effect in Gaza is due to their involvement. Burkina Faso welcomes and encourages their efforts.

As for the Security Council, it must maintain the necessary pressure on the political leaders of Israel and

Palestine by reminding them of the need for strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Finally, international organizations must continue their assistance to the development of Palestine with a view to the building of a viable State within the framework of the agreement to establish the two States.

With respect to international cooperation, it may be that the new organization, the Union for the Mediterranean, whose members include some Middle East States, could also make a contribution to the settlement of the conflict.

One thing is certain: it is the expressed will of Palestinian and Israeli officials to persevere and make progress in the bilateral negotiations to achieve the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security, if possible by the end of this year. We earnestly encourage them in that effort, convinced that, ultimately, that is the only way to find a solution.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for the briefing that he has just given us and the representatives of Israel and Palestine for their respective statements.

Allow me to take this opportunity to bid farewell to Ambassador Dan Gillerman, to convey to him the gratitude of Panama and myself for the manner in which he has led his mission to the United Nations, and to wish him every success in his future activities.

Mr. Pascoe's briefing conveyed both a negative and positive picture of the region, but it is on the latter that Panama wishes to place emphasis on this occasion. As was stated by Mr. Pascoe in his report, the ceasefire mediated by Egypt over a month ago between Hamas and Israel has remained nearly unbroken, inaugurating a period of relative calm to Gaza and Israel and allowing their respective populations at the very least to live in a space free from violence. We trust that that reciprocal measure will enable the bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians to take place in an improved climate of trust, and we call for the extension of the ceasefire to the West Bank.

We are also encouraged by the news of the exchange of prisoners or human remains between Israel and Hizbullah through the mediation of Germany, proximity talks between Israeli and Syrian negotiators through the good offices of Turkey, and the efforts of the President of France to encourage Syria and Lebanon to resume diplomatic relations.

In addition, we recognize the significant efforts deployed by Qatar towards the establishment of a national unity Government in Lebanon. The delegation of Panama expresses its profound gratitude to all those individuals and Governments who worked to ensure that those events would take place.

Those achievements confirm the fact that, in spite of the desire and need to obtain a comprehensive peace in order to resolve the question of the Middle East, taking discreet steps and reaching timely agreements can serve as catalysts for reaching broader and more substantial agreements. In that context, my delegation echoes all those Governments and non-governmental organizations that have declared that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, and in particular its construction of settlements in those territories, remain serious obstacles to the peace process. Israel must therefore immediately cease the construction of settlements.

In that context, Panama takes this opportunity to affirm, as we have on earlier occasions, that any peace agreement between Palestine and Israel must provide for the existence of two States living side by side in peace with each other and with their neighbours, with the 1967 borders recognized as their common borders. In that regard, we call for a timely completion of the respective negotiations to achieve the rapid release of the abducted Israeli corporal, Gilad Shalit, and Israel's transfer to Lebanon of the Shaba'a Farms.

Finally, now more than ever, the peace process in the Middle East requires the political resolve of all the parties directly involved and the active participation of the international community and of this Security Council. Everything indicates that this is a rare and all-too-elusive moment of hope.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): Allow me to begin by paying a warm tribute to the work of Ambassador Gillerman. I do not think there is anyone here at the United Nations who has to work harder than Ambassador Gillerman to defend the reputation of his country, or anyone who does it with the same brilliance, charm, incisive intellect and dedication that he has brought to the task over the past six years. He is going to be sorely missed, although I am sure we will listen to his successor in this Chamber with the same rapt attention with which we have listened to him.

I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his detailed briefing on the situation in the region. My country gives its unwavering support to the peace process and the agreements reached at Annapolis. We welcome the most recent meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert in Paris this past week. The success of the bilateral negotiations is going to depend in part on a public perception in the region that progress is being made on the ground.

My Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, earlier this week visited the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel and gave a moving and powerful speech to the Knesset, the first ever by a British Prime Minister. When he was in Israel, my Prime Minister reiterated that settlement-building erodes trust, heightens Palestinian suffering and makes the compromises that Israel will need to make for peace more difficult. It is therefore crucial, both for the daily lives of Palestinians and for peace to be achieved, that Israel freeze settlements and dismantle outposts, as it has agreed to do.

While in Palestine, my Prime Minister made clear that the Palestinians must continue to act with perseverance and persistence against terrorists who target Israeli civilians. We welcome the security sector reforms that the Palestinian Authority is implementing and we are happy to play a part in those efforts.

Egypt's tireless work has led to a ceasefire agreement in Gaza. We commend all parties for their continued commitment to that agreement, and it is important that the United Nations support efforts to deal with the outstanding issues, including the end of arms smuggling and the return of Corporal Shalit. We hope that Israel, in line with its own commitments, will reopen crossings and increase supplies to Gaza. We welcome the lead the United Nations is taking by putting forward the immediate steps that could be taken to improve the humanitarian situation.

However, the Palestinian Authority is at a critical juncture. As Mr. Pascoe's briefing made clear, the Authority will be in the red in a matter of weeks. The European Union and the United Kingdom have responded to Palestinian requests to front-load our budget support. We have done so, and we have spent what we can for this year. Others must now follow through on the pledges they made at Paris last December, and to which they committed again at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in London in May.

The Security Council has its part to play. We have consistently made clear that the Security Council should be able to find its voice once more on the issue of the Middle East. To that end, the Council has worked for some weeks to seek agreement on a draft resolution that is both balanced and engages constructively in support of the Annapolis process and of progress on the ground. Our assessment is that a text that focuses on only one aspect of the conflict will not find the necessary degree of support in this Council. We hope that the Council can continue to work on that issue without a fixed timeline and offer its voice and its authority in support of the intensive efforts under way to find peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The United Kingdom welcomes the formation of a national unity Government in Lebanon. That is an important step in delivering on the Doha agreement of May and in promoting the long-term stability of Lebanon. Lebanon has the United Kingdom's full support in tackling the important challenges that lie ahead. Those include a programme of support to the Lebanese security sector, assistance to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and unswerving support for the International Independent Investigation Commission and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The United Kingdom underlines the importance of the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). We welcome the exchange of prisoners that was brokered by the German authorities and pay tribute to those who have worked intensively to secure that outcome. We continue to support the vital work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in maintaining peace and stability in south Lebanon. It is important, too, that Lebanese militias be prevented from acquiring arms via Syrian territory and we will continue to provide support to Lebanese security forces to increase their capacity for effective border management.

We welcome the recent meeting between President Sleiman and President Assad in Paris and hope that renewed political contacts between the leaders of Syria and Lebanon will translate into concrete action to delineate borders and establish diplomatic relations between the two countries, as called for in Security Council resolutions.

We are encouraged by the continued proximity talks between Israel and Syria under Turkey's auspices. However, we believe that there is more that Syria could do to support the wider peace process, including by ending their support for Palestinian rejectionist movements.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me first of all join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

My delegation also would like to associate itself with the statement to be made by the distinguished representative of Cuba, who will speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Conflict in the Middle East has continued for far too long, taking the lives of countless civilians, wrecking families and preventing its young population from fully reaping the benefits of global economic development. For sixty years, the region has been a theatre of tension and violence, and on the Palestinian side, the nation has continuously faced hardship and has nad to survive without a State. They have suffered the worst.

This has been going on for far too long, so long that it has tarnished our collective conscience. The Middle East conflict continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. Not because merely in and of itself, but also because of the inability of the Council to take concrete and resolute action.

The Council should play its own role in the process of achieving comprehensive peace in the region. It has moral and Charter responsibilities to make a contribution to the solution of the Middle East and should devote the same consummate political energy to resolve this conflict as it has devoted to conflicts in other parts of the globe. We call for the same vigour and allocation of time in addressing the Middle East conflict.

At present, prospects for peace in the region are flourishing. We must seize this opportunity. We are particularly heartened by the current surge in diplomacy aimed at jumpstarting a comprehensive peace process, as demonstrated by the ongoing negotiations between Israel and Palestine, the launching of indirect talks between Syria and Israel and potential steps on the Lebanon-Israeli track.

We are also encouraged by the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, steps towards normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria, the swap of prisoners between Israel and Hezbollah, as well as the increasing stability in Lebanon after the election of its President.

Also key to the establishment of a Palestinian State and genuine peace for all Palestinians is inter-Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation. We therefore continue to attach great significance to the Yemen agreement that outlined important avenues for dialogue and reconciliation among Palestinians.

With those positive developments, we have reasons to be hopeful that those achievements could eventually crystallize into a new equilibrium, in which all nations in the region share peace dividends and an independent and viable State of Palestine stands side by side in harmony with its neighbours. We, the international community, have been waiting for that moment.

Despite recent progress, we certainly cannot be complacent. Much remain to be done. The Middle East conflict will remain unresolved if all parties concerned do not go beyond the ordinary in their efforts to ensure a viable solution to the conflict. There is no better time than now to act to resolve the conflict and broker a peace. We welcome in that regard the unflagging commitment and contribution of the Arab League, the Quartet and countries in the region.

One challenge that now needs to be urgently addressed is the problem of Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian territory. Those activities constitute grave breaches of international law and a serious obstacle to the establishment of a physically viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian State and thus to the achievement of peace itself. These illegal activities must be terminated immediately. The Security Council, for its part, should pronounce itself clearly and vigorously on this very important matter.

Indonesia therefore fully supports the draft resolution recently proposed by the members of the Arab Group.

Similarly important to achieving sustainable peace are continuous efforts in addressing other core issues, including borders, the issue of Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem. The humanitarian situation in Gaza, which remains dire, also warrants continued response from the international community.

A viable Palestine State cannot be built in a day. It will require continued preparation and planning. Indonesia, therefore, attaches great importance to the

Paris donors conference, the Palestine Investment Conference and the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and Rule of Law.

For our part, Indonesia, in collaboration with South Africa, has hosted the Asia-Africa Ministerial Conference on Capacity-Building for Palestine in Jakarta from 14 to 15 July 2008.

As a logical complement to the Annapolis Conference, this initiative is aimed at, among other goals, serving as a catalyst to the peace process in the light of the anticipated establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. Imbued with the Bandung spirit, the conference resulted in a list of commitments, including training assistance for as many as 10,000 Palestinians, including in the fields of law enforcement and administrative reform.

With regard to Lebanon, in line with the Doha agreement on Lebanon, we welcome the election of General Sleiman as President of Lebanon and we are hopeful that the new cabinet will be established as soon as possible.

We are concerned over the recent clashes in Tripoli, which caused injuries and casualties. My delegation therefore attaches primary significance to an item in the Doha agreement underlining that all parties will commit not to resort to arms or violence in order to resolve political conflicts.

Unity is a key aspect to the achievement of sustainable peace in Lebanon. Accordingly, we welcome President Sleiman's efforts in promoting dialogue and reconciliation in the country.

A peace process is not an easy venture. It never has been. It is a long and arduous journey that needs our outmost care and constant attention. As long as we promote peaceful ways rather than violence, negotiations rather than the use of military force and dialogue rather than confrontation, we shall surely be able to reach our end goal of comprehensive peace in the region.

It is therefore our fervent hope that ongoing efforts will yield results in the realization of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of Land for Peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Skračić (Croatia): Let me begin by extending our thanks to Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his candid and informative statement.

While Croatia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by France on behalf of the European Union, allow me to make some further points on behalf of my delegation.

My country joined the Council as an elected member in a year marked by renewed hope for reaching comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Late last year, the international community gathered at the Annapolis Peace Conference and pledged its support for this process.

The parties have since demonstrated admirable courage and determination in pursuing that track. My delegation finds encouragement in the fact, that, despite the challenges, the two parties remain committed to and engaged in bilateral talks within the framework of the Annapolis process.

Achieving a two-State solution and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, should remain the ultimate goal. We believe that the international community, including this Council, has to do its utmost to support the parties in this goal.

We remain cognizant of the fact that progress in the political and diplomatic process remains inextricably linked with tangible improvements on the ground, and we share the views expressed in the latest Quartet statement in Berlin on 24 June that there is urgent need for more progress on the ground in order to build confidence and support the progress in the negotiations.

That is why we fully support the international effort that began last December with the Paris donors conference, followed by the Palestinian Investment Conference in Bethlehem in May and the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law in June. This effort, coupled with the special envoy's effort to bring the parties together and stimulate economic renewal, helps to bring about a climate of confidence, security and physical mobility, thereby building a platform for peace. That is why it is critical that donors' commitments are being fulfilled.

In this context, let me also reiterate our support for the objectives promoted by the Berlin conference on security and the rule of law. Security is the most important service that any Government can provide to its citizens, if I may cite Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. This requirement extends to building up an effective and accountable security infrastructure, including a proper criminal justice system, as well as the police sector. The ability of the Palestinian Authority to build credible institutions and manage security is of key importance for both sides. Not only is it an essential element of Palestinian State-building, it is also a legitimate expectation on the Israeli side. Israel must have confidence that a two-State solution will not compromise the safety and security of its citizens. That can only be achieved if there is a viable, responsible and democratic Palestinian State by its side, a State that is willing and able to combat terrorism and anarchy.

Over recent weeks, we have seen a number of positive signals coming from the region. Having said that, let me also congratulate France, which holds the presidency of the European Union, on its successful effort to introduce new dynamism in the region through the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Recognizing that peace in the Middle East requires a comprehensive solution, we welcome Israel's readiness to take steps to reach out to the other actors in the region, demonstrating interest in addressing a number of challenging issues. We remain hopeful that these steps will be met with a positive and responsible response so as to reinforce the dynamic of peace.

The period of calm in Gaza and the announcement that Israel and Syria have been conducting indirect peace talks have been encouraging indeed, as was last week's prisoner exchange between Israel and Hizbullah, which we hope will be conducive to further positive moves.

We are gravely concerned by actions that are putting strains on the Gaza period of calm, including today's attack, as well as the outrageous attack that took place in Jerusalem on 2 July, which we condemn once again in the strongest terms. We appeal for every effort to sustain the period of calm in Gaza and thus to enable the restrictions on Gaza to be progressively eased, the crossings reopened and the United Nations projects resumed. We also hope to see progress regarding the case of abducted Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit.

Turning to Lebanon, my delegation welcomes the recent formation of a national unity Government in Beirut as well as the election of Mr. Sleiman as President of Lebanon in May. We hope that this momentum, initiated by the Doha agreement, will be used to consolidate the constitutional institutions of Lebanon and strengthen the Government's control over its entire territory.

The acute sectarian violence in May was a stark reminder of the relevance of the requirement to disarm all non-government groups, Lebanese and non-Lebanese alike. It is now essential that the totality of the commitments accepted by Lebanon's political leaders in the Doha agreement be fully implemented, including the ban against using arms to further political goals.

It is equally important that the obligations arising out of the Taif Agreement also be implemented, along with relevant Security Council resolutions. We are encouraged by the announced intentions to establish diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon and salute this week's high-level meetings in Beirut. It is our hope that these recent developments will translate into effective consolidation of Lebanon's stability and sovereignty, thus contributing to the peace and stability of the wider region.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We too wish to thank Mr. Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the developments in the region over the past month. My delegation also aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Let me also welcome the participation of the Observer Mission of Palestine and, of course, our friend Ambassador Gillerman, who will be leaving his post at the end of this month. Mr. Gillerman said in his statement that, being the ambassador for Israel was not always an easy task, and as someone who has been here for the six years that he has served, I agree. I wish him well in his new responsibilities as he leaves here to pursue other tasks.

Over the last few months, we have seen various positive initiatives aimed at finding a negotiated settlement to the myriad of disputes in the Middle East. Many of these initiatives are in their infancy. However, they have already led to a relative calming of the situation, and some have already produced positive results.

As we consider these developments in the Middle East, it is important to note that it is the parties themselves, with the support of the countries in their own region, including mediation efforts by the League of Arab States, who are embarking on the initiative to resolve these conflicts. The Security Council should support and encourage these home-grown solutions and regional efforts.

It is also for this reason that we welcome recent positive developments. We support the view that the situation in Lebanon can only be resolved through peaceful dialogue, national reconciliation, bilateral cooperation with Lebanon's neighbours, the withdrawal of all Israeli forces and settlers from its territory, and a fair solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

My delegation joins the global condemnation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. We believe that the settlement activity in the occupied territory is illegal and changes the facts on the ground and that it is a key obstacle to the peace process. The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, prohibits are occupying Power from transferring parts of its own civilian population to the territory it occupies. We urge the Council to demand that Israel immediately and completely freeze all settlement activity, including dismantling outposts erected since March 2001, in order not to change facts on the ground and prejudice final status negotiations.

My delegation welcomes the efforts of the Egyptian Government in brokering a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and urges both Israel and Hamas to abide by their obligations in terms of their agreement to avoid a further deterioration in the cycle of violence in the region.

We note that discussions are continuing on further outstanding issues, including easing border restrictions even further. We would like to recall the letter dated 25 June 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, in which Ambassador Mansour stated:

> "we reaffirm the imperative of extending the ceasefire to the West Bank, as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank constitute one geographical unit — the occupied Palestinian territory — and, as such, Israeli military operations and attacks in either area have negative repercussions". (*S/2008/421*)

South Africa continues to encourage both the Israeli and the Palestinian negotiating teams to continue their negotiations to achieve the goal of the establishment of a Palestinian State before the end of 2008, as declared at the Annapolis Middle East peace meeting. The parties and the international community cannot sit back and allow the situation on the ground to continue to deteriorate, ending all hopes for a negotiated two-State solution.

We reiterate that the responsibility for peace and security lies with the two sides. In that regard, it is crucial that their actions and pronouncements be calculated to advance the quest for peace.

Finally, every briefing that we have received continues to indicate that the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian areas has not significantly improved. The innocent civilians on both sides, on the Israeli side and the Palestinian side, continue to suffer the consequences of an elusive peace. The unjustified and illegal acts by Israel, such as the siege of Gaza, as well the continued incursions into the West Bank, the expansion of illegal settlements, military posts and checkpoints, and the separation wall in the West Bank, are not contributing to any change in the situation.

South Africa believes that the two-State solution, one that creates a State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital living side by side in peace and security with a State of Israel, is the only way to bring about long-term peace to Israel. I am very pleased that Ambassador Gillerman, in his final statement before the Council, reiterated that the vision of the two-State solution is the one that may finally bring peace to that area and, once again, we wish him well in his next venture.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing and welcome the presence with us of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine. I wish to pay tribute to the Permanent Representative of Israel, Ambassador Gillerman, who is sitting in the Council for the last time in his tenure in New York.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union.

As negotiations proceed, the concerns of the parties are being clearly outlined in terms of the pain that the inevitable compromises in the future peace agreement will entail. Italy considers the security of Israel as non-negotiable. Israel's security cannot be truly guaranteed until an independent, modern, democratic and viable Palestinian State is created. The establishment of solid institutions based on the rule of law and good governance is fundamental. We need to facilitate the formation of a modern legal framework by supporting appropriate reforms in public administration at both the local and the central levels. The reform and the strengthening of the Palestinian security sector and the rule of law are therefore a priority.

It is also essential to finalize a solution to the inter-Palestinian crisis, fully restoring constitutional legality in the Gaza Strip and reopening all crossing points. It is important to increase the level of coordination of all international contributions in support of the Palestinian economy and administration.

However, Israel must be encouraged to reduce obstacles to the free movement of goods and persons in the West Bank and increase corporation with the Palestinian security authorities. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority must be supported and encouraged in its endeavours to consolidate security, particularly the control and repression of terrorism.

In view of a progressive realization of conditions for a peace agreement, the Arab countries must play their part in contributing to the development of the Palestinian economy.

The lasting calm in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel contributes favourably to a continuation of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as it considerably reduces the risk of instability or violence jeopardizing the dialogue.

On Lebanon, Italy expresses great satisfaction at the formation of the Lebanese Government. It is now time for the international community strongly to support the resumption of a national dialogue, in keeping with the Doha Agreement. In that respect, Italy reaffirms its support for the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon. Our role in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which constitutes a crucial factor in the country's stabilization, is a clear sign of our commitment. In view of thorough stabilization, the progressive disarmament of militia through the political process, in line with the commitments made in Doha, could prove to be a vital contribution to the future growth of Lebanon in conditions of lasting peace and harmony.

It is also with great satisfaction that we learn of Syria's recent decision to start constructive political talks with neighbouring countries. The recent statements by Syrian leaders expressing the will to proceed with the normalization of relations with Lebanon are promising. It is our hope that the necessary steps towards normalization will be taken first and foremost by restoring diplomatic relations and beginning work on the demarcation of the border.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his very detailed briefing. I should also like to thank the representative of Palestine for her statement. Lastly, like my colleagues, I should like to pay tribute to our colleague and friend Dan Gillerman, who, with talent and a great sense of interaction, was able to uphold the positions of his country, Israel, a country that is a friend and crucial partner of France and Europe, particularly within the Barcelona Process-Union of the Mediterranean that has just been established in Paris. Like my colleagues, I would like to wish him all the best as he continues his personal and professional life.

Today, I have the honour to speak on behalf of France and on behalf of the European Union, as well as the countries that align themselves with those statements.

In the Middle East, we have been getting encouraging signs from the different tracks of the peace process: between Israelis and Palestinians, who have engaged in comprehensive discussions since Annapolis; between the Israelis and Syrians, who have engaged in indirect talks under the auspices of Turkey; in Lebanon, where the implementation of the Doha Agreement and of resolution 1701 (2006) has continued; and lastly in Gaza, where with Egyptian mediation a truce has been called.

The international community must continue to mobilize and support that momentum so that the various parties involved in Middle East tension and conflict move towards sustainable peace.

The recent Union for the Mediterranean Summit showed that the European Union could make a contribution to stability and peace in the Middle East, notably via the creation of new dialogue forums.

Pursuant to the commitments made in Annapolis, the objective remains to create a viable, independent, democratic and fully sovereign Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel by year's end. Naturally, that is a hard road, obstacles exist and both parties must make painful compromises that will be necessary in the coming weeks and months.

Negotiations between the parties continue, whilst the day-to-day reality damages public opinion regarding the credibility of the political process in the eyes of the public as a result of attacks in Jerusalem, Israeli incursions into the West Bank, the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza and continued sporadic violence despite the truce, including firing rockets that the European Union strongly condemns, the maintaining of checkpoints, settlement activity, especially in East Jerusalem but also in the West Bank. The building of settlements anywhere in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law. Settlement activities prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations and compromise the viability of a jointly agreed two-State solution.

In parallel with negotiations and in order to ensure that the populations involved stick to the ongoing political process, the situation on the ground and in day-to-day life must change. The reforms undertaken by Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad are to be welcomed, but if they are to bear fruit, meaningful gestures must be made in the days and weeks to come. That is most urgent. If the Palestinian economy is to develop, a genuine improvement in the free movement of goods and persons in the West Bank must be a priority. For its part, the Palestinian Authority must pursue its security efforts. The Israeli freeze on all settlement activity and the dismantling of unauthorized settlement outposts built since 2001 must begin.

The situation in the Gaza Strip, a territory that has suffered for far too long, must not be forgotten. We welcome President Abbas's efforts to achieve political reconciliation among the Palestinians. His approach to peace should enjoy the broadest possible support. Hamas must comply with the three Quartet principles guiding the peace process, first and foremost among which is the renunciation of violence.

If the gains achieved in Annapolis and at the Paris, London, Berlin and Bethlehem conferences and the summit of the Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean process are not to be squandered, the parties must push ahead with negotiations and the situation on the ground must change for the better. Naturally, it is up to the leaders of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to decide through negotiation upon the terms of a comprehensive settlement. The international community, and in particular the European Union and all nations of the Middle East, can contribute to the finalization and implementation of the final agreement. The international community can provide guarantees to the parties to promote the implementation of an agreement on peace, security, the economy, refugees and Jerusalem.

The changing situation in Lebanon has helped to restore sorely needed calm to the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and to the Near East. In that context, we welcome the formation of a Government of National Unity, headed by Fouad Siniora, that allows all major stakeholders to be represented. Following the election of President Michel Sleiman, that was another step in implementation of the Doha agreement. The agreement favours the logic of dialogue that the European Union has tirelessly promoted through the ongoing efforts of the League of Arab States and Qatar. As we all know, the implementation of the agreement should now proceed with the drafting of an electoral law and the launch of national dialogue in the interests of all parties in Lebanon and throughout the region.

The Europeans are committed to encouraging the irreversible process of establishing the Special Tribunal. They remain committed to the unity, independence, sovereignty and stability of Lebanon in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). It is essential that the Lebanese State be able to extend its authority throughout its territory. The European Union comprises the backbone of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and will continue to lend it its full support.

While fully respecting the independence and sovereignty of both countries and well aware of the special relations that history has bequeathed them, we hope that the détente made possible in Lebanon by the

Doha agreement will encourage dialogue between Syria and Lebanon. We welcome the commitment made in Paris by the two heads of State to establish diplomatic relations. That decision must now be implemented, as must the border demarcation between the two States.

In conclusion, Syrian and Israel have begun proximity peace talks under the auspices of Turkey. That is yet another example of the triumph of the logic of dialogue and should be encouraged without dismissing the difficulties involved and by advancing through a series of necessary phases. That progress must be pursued and Syria must continue to play a constructive role in the region.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by bidding farewell to my good friend Ambassador Gillerman, who has appeared before the Council today for the last time. I wish to tell him that we will miss him and his impassioned defence of his country's interests, and we shall always remember him gratefully.

I also wish to thank the representative of Palestine for her statement.

We thank you, Sir, and the Vietnamese delegation for convening this open debate and commend your leadership in ensuring that it took place. The situation in the Middle East truly requires the frequent involvement of the membership of the Organization. We understand and share the frustration of those who have criticized the way in which opportunities such as this are exploited by those seeking to advance domestic policy agendas. However, we feel that to be the price we must pay for the legitimacy that accrues to the Council when it heeds the voices of the States on whose behalf it exercises its mandate.

I thank the Secretary-General for his report and Mr. Pascoe for his briefing this morning.

As I have said on a previous occasion, the Security Council has become a part of the problems besetting the Middle East. For some years now, the voice of the Security Council has gone unheard and its contribution to resolving the region's problems has been close to nil. Worse yet, the Council's silence, arising from a stalemate caused by cross-purposes and selfish interests, is a sorry contribution to those problems, and not to the solutions that millions of human beings living in fear and anguish deserve. Our dear friend Ambassador Spatafora of Italy recently warned us that the Council's inaction could make it irrelevant as an actor on the international stage. Costa Rica is convinced that that is a luxury that the international community can ill afford. The United Nations and the Security Council in particular are part of a common estate that humankind must not squander. As has already been seen, the Council's irrelevance can lead only to a world that exists beyond the bounds of the law. That is a responsibility that Costa Rica will not join in shouldering.

The consideration of the situation in the Middle East requires courage, as we know. We have sometimes borne witness in other forums to demonstrations of the courage that is so lacking here in the Council. Outside these walls, the President of France, the United States Secretary of State and the Quartet freely reproach Israel for its persistent policy of establishing illegal settlements, but in this Council we are unable to reach a similar agreement, nor have we mustered sufficient resolve to condemn acts directed against Israeli territory that cannot be qualified as anything but terrorist. Frequently, too, we hear the Secretary-General voice ideas and launch appeals that should originate from or, at the very least, be embraced by the Council.

For Costa Rica, the Council's silence can lead only to the persistent violation of all the norms that should govern civilized coexistence among peoples. The Council's irrelevance to international life could allow multilateral mechanisms to go to waste instead of being used as innovative instruments for attaining peace, protecting human rights and promoting development for all.

In the light of all that, Costa Rica wishes to contribute to this debate a brief assessment of the situation in the Middle East. If the Council will not or cannot express its concern at the long-standing grave humanitarian situation in Gaza, and if the Council is will not or cannot condemn, as it should, policies and actions that undermine efforts to attain peace, it should at the very least consider positive elements that could help establish a climate conducive to understanding.

In that regard, we are grateful to Egypt for its mediation that resulted in a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. We are also grateful to Turkey for its mediation, which has encouraged rapprochement between Israel and Syria, and to Qatar for its good offices, which have facilitated institutional normalization in Lebanon. We also recognize the efforts that made possible the exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hizbullah. We welcome the measures adopted by Palestinian security forces aimed at restoring order in the West Bank.

We welcome the convening of the summit of the Union for the Mediterranean under the auspices of French President Sarkozy, which underscored the resolve of all parties to continue to work to ensure peace throughout the Mediterranean Basin and during which Syria and Lebanon announced the resumption of diplomatic relations.

Costa Rica echoes the report of the Secretary-General and reaffirms the need for compliance with obligations with which the parties are very well acquainted. In the Middle East, there will be no final victory for some over the others: peace can only be the outcome of moderate voices calling for the creative and respectful coexistence of two independent States within secure and recognized boundaries.

Mr. Li Kexin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks you, Mr. President, for having convened this public debate. Our thanks go also to Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Although the situation in the Middle East remains fragile and volatile, there has been significant progress since March, when the Council held its previous open debate on the subject (see S/PV.5859). We welcome the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and we are pleased to see that leaders on both sides — in Palestine and in Israel — are determined to move the negotiating process forward. We welcome the active diplomatic efforts of Arab countries to promote the internal unity of Palestine. We are greatly encouraged by developments such as the proximity talks between Syria and Israel, the agreement on an exchange of prisoners between Lebanon and Israel, and the commitment made by Lebanon and Syria to strengthen their relations. Recently, a Government of national unity was formed in Lebanon, and we congratulate the Lebanese people on that achievement.

The current positive progress and momentum are hard-won results achieved jointly by the parties concerned with the support of the international community. Those results are to be doubly prized in the light of the difficult situation over the past two years, and in particular over the past several months. The parties concerned should continue to show their political will and tackle the difficulties and challenges head-on. They should redouble their efforts to attain a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Here, I wish to make three points.

First, it is important to provide further assistance to the Palestinian people. There has been no discernable improvement in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and the situation in the West Bank is also a matter of concern. The Palestinian people both in Gaza and in the West Bank are a single whole, and the international community should accord them equal importance. It is important both to provide them with assistance and to help the Palestinian Authority with the building of institutions and capacity. To maintain the internal unity of the various Palestinian factions is the ardent hope of the vast majority of the Palestinian people. The international community should intensify its efforts to promote Palestinian internal unity. Here, we express our support for the efforts being undertaken by Egypt and other Arab countries.

Secondly, it is important to create conditions conducive to political negotiations between Israel and Palestine. We are now at the midpoint of the Annapolis process timetable, and the parties have high expectations of the negotiations. We hope that the parties concerned will take concrete action to accelerate the negotiating process and do everything possible to avoid any action that could harm the negotiating climate. Israel's continued establishment of settlements while negotiations are under way is clearly not conducive to those negotiations. Countries with substantial leverage on the negotiating parties should exert a positive influence by urging them to make strategic choices.

Thirdly, it is important to promote a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The Lebanon-Israel track and the Syria-Israel track are both important parts of the overall Middle East issue and are closely linked to the Palestine-Israel track. At present there are important opportunities to improve relations between Lebanon and Israel and between Syria and Israel; that would have a positive impact on the negotiations between Israel and Palestine. The international community should provide further assistance in that regard.

The support of the international community is indispensable for the achievement of peace in the

Middle East. We are confident that the Security Council, as an organ of great importance for the maintenance of international peace and security, has an important role to play and that it can play it.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I too wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his very detailed and comprehensive briefing. I wish also to thank the representative of Palestine and Ambassador Gillerman for their useful contributions to our debate. On behalf of Belgium, a friend of Israel, I wish Ambassador Gillerman all the best in his future endeavours.

Two years ago, the most serious crisis that had affected the region in a long time threatened to bury once and for all the hope of the peoples of the Middle East that they might live in common peace and security. By contrast, the developments of recent weeks — at the international level, regionally and on the ground — give the affected populations hope of lasting stability. That hope is fragile to be sure, but it is real. The events of recent weeks are also a source of encouragement for all concerned to continue and redouble our efforts.

It is from that dual perspective that I wish to address the Council today. Meeting in Paris along with the 27 members of the European Union and all other Mediterranean countries, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert publicly confirmed their shared commitment to Annapolis. In-depth negotiations are to lead by the end of 2008 to a peace agreement leading to the establishment in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of an independent and viable Palestinian State. It seems inevitable that there will be difficulties before such an agreement is concluded, but Belgium and its European partners extend their support to the Israeli and Palestinian leaders for the political courage they have shown in pursuing this process.

But negotiations alone will not be enough. As the European Union and its Quartet partners recalled on 24 June, it is urgent that tangible progress support the ongoing process of bilateral negotiations. The daily realities indeed threaten the credibility of the entire political process.

In that context, there are a number of priority issues. Several projects, in Jenin and in Bethlehem, have proven that there is potential for cooperation between the Israelis and the Palestinians in making a difference in the security and economic spheres.

Those examples show the path to follow. But, if we are to avoid a crisis of confidence, which would threaten this cooperation, those projects must be linked to respect for the commitments set out in the Road Map. In that connection, we encourage the efforts of Prime Minister Fayyad to strengthen his Government's capacities to ensure the rule of law. We reiterate our appeal to the Israeli Government to facilitate those efforts, in particular by avoiding new military operations in the areas now under the control of the Palestinian Authority and by ensuring a tangible improvement in freedom of movement in the West Bank. Finally, we call on the Israeli Government to immediately put an end to all settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem. Indeed, such activity is not only illegal, but totally contradicts the spirit of the ongoing negotiating process.

In Gaza, thanks to the Egyptian mediation, the populations in the Gaza Strip and in southern Israel have been enjoying a period of relative calm for several weeks. However, several incidents remind us of its fragility and of the urgent need for a halt to the violence, beginning with the firing of rockets. Thus, if it is to last, this period of calm must not be an end in itself; rather, it must become a step towards normalization not only of the security situation in the Gaza Strip, but also of the humanitarian, economic and political situation there, and must lead to the release of Corporal Shalit.

Moreover, we encourage the efforts of President Abbas with a view to a political reconciliation among the Palestinians. We appeal to the parties concerned to do their utmost to permit the reopening of the crossing points under Palestinian Authority control, while reaffirming the European Union's readiness to resume its monitoring mission in Rafah.

In addition to facilitating the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the summit of the Union for the Mediterranean enabled the Syrian and Israeli leaders to confirm the continuation of their indirect negotiations, which were re-launched under the aegis of Turkey. Belgium welcomes this resumption of a dialogue that is taking place within the framework of the Madrid Agreements and that thus can only benefit all the efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

In the context of the hopes and challenges that have arisen out of recent regional developments, I should like to conclude with a few words on Lebanon. After a prolonged political and institutional stalemate, and after the fears aroused by the resort to arms by some Lebanese against other Lebanese, the Doha agreement has offered the prospect of lasting stabilization of the country and of its rejection of violence. The election of President Sleiman and the formation of a unity Government are important steps. They should encourage the Lebanese leaders to invest in comprehensive implementation of the Doha agreement, while agreeing on the electoral law and resuming the national dialogue, so as to guarantee the unity, independence, sovereignty and stability of Lebanon, as hoped for by the Lebanese. It is in that context that we appeal to Presidents Sleiman and Al-Assad to swiftly implement their joint statements aimed at normalizing the bilateral relations between their countries.

With the objectives of stability and peace, which are at the heart of resolution 1701 (2006), in mind, Belgium associates itself with the statement of the Secretary-General in hoping that the humanitarian gestures of 16 July will make a positive contribution to regional stability, while we convey our condolences to the affected families.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the situation regarding a Middle East settlement. We listened carefully to the statements made by the representative of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel. We hope that, after he leaves New York, Ambassador Gillerman will, on the basis of the rich experience gained here, devote his energies and talents to the cause of a just Israeli-Palestinian settlement and a comprehensive Middle East settlement. Without these, there can be no truly prosperous Israel, living side by side with an equally prosperous Palestinian State. That is precisely what, we firmly believe, should be the goal of the entire international community.

Russia welcomes the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. The keys to success are a fundamental commitment by the parties to the provisions of the Road Map, a recognition of the need to implement the obligations set out in that instrument and assistance in creating conditions conducive to the establishment of a lasting peace in the Middle East. Those objectives can be attained only through mutual compromise, and efforts to achieve concrete results will ultimately ensure the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, living in peace with its Israeli neighbour within secure internationally recognized borders and fully renouncing terrorism as a method of achieving political goals.

However, the current tangible progress being made on the diplomatic front cannot conceal the ongoing alarming events occurring in daily life, many of which were referred to today by Mr. Pascoe. Despite the truce, which is generally being observed, the threat against the lives of Israeli citizens fully remains as a result of extremist raids, as confirmed by the terrorist acts committed in Jerusalem on 2 July and today, 22 July. The Palestinians need to comply fully with their counter-terrorist obligations under the Road Map.

The difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza continues. In the West Bank, the Israeli authorities, ignoring the repeated appeals of the United Nations and the international community, continue to build settlements and the separation wall. The Palestinian people continue to suffer from poverty and unemployment. They are unable to move freely between their towns and are often victims of arbitrary behaviour at Israeli checkpoints.

Given all that, the international community and, in particular, the Quartet of Middle East mediators, must do their utmost to establish an atmosphere conducive to the establishment of Israeli-Palestinian contacts. Arrangements for lasting peace between the parties will not be possible unless Gaza and the West Bank are reunited under the leadership of the legitimate administration of the Palestinian Authority. Russia is doing its utmost to support current efforts to restore Palestinian unity on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization programme and is sending a clear signal to Hamas and President Abbas as to the timeliness of their current efforts to heal the destructive rift between the leading Palestinian factions.

We welcome the contacts being made between Syria and Israel with the effective mediation of Turkey. We anticipate that those contacts will continue and move steadily towards full-scale direct talks aimed at creating the ultimate conditions for peace between the two States: an end to the occupation and a comprehensive settlement of the long Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the relevant decisions of the Security Council, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. That is a strategy of justice, security and peace. Its objectives are fully attainable if all stakeholders shoulder their obligations to help to advance them.

In that context, I wish to reaffirm that Russia firmly intends — with the support of the Quartet, as reaffirmed at its recent Berlin meeting, and with the support of a broad range of other interested parties — to hold an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow. The conference should provide a powerful impetus for accelerating the Annapolis process and advancing the peace efforts on other tracks of the Middle East settlement process.

I now turn to the situation in Lebanon. We welcome the formation of a Government of national unity in that country. A very important step has thereby been taken towards full implementation of the agreement reached by the Lebanese parties at Doha with the mediation of the League of Arab States and Qatar.

We welcome Lebanon's reaffirmation of its ability, independently and without outside interference, to achieve consensus in the service of higher national interests. The completion of the formation of the Lebanese constitutional bodies of Government, which was reached through serious efforts and mutual compromises, was aimed at ensuring further progress in resolving other issues on the national agenda in the interests of strengthening the independence, sovereignty and unity of Lebanon. To that end, Lebanese parties need to abide strictly by the existing arrangements and refrain from any steps that could spark tensions.

Russia will continue to contribute to addressing Lebanese problems peacefully, on the basis of intra-Lebanese dialogue and consent, without outside interference from anywhere in the affairs of Lebanon. In that regard, we welcome the practical steps taken by Beirut and Damascus to normalize the entire range of Syrian/Lebanese relations.

We are pleased that mutually acceptable solutions have been found to a number of challenging problems related to Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons and with respect to clarifying the fate of the Israeli soldiers who have been missing since July 2006. We view the United Nations-sponsored humanitarian exchanges between Israel and the Lebanese Hizbollah as an important development in line with the demands of the international community, including resolution 1701 (2006). Those exchanges contribute to easing tensions in the Middle East and reaffirm that constructive dialogue and not confrontation yields results in the interests of the civilian population of the Middle East.

Much is currently being said about the emerging positive trends in various areas of the Middle East peace process. That is indeed true. Under such conditions, it is particularly important that collective efforts through the channels of multilateral diplomacy consolidate those gains in every respect, working to achieve, by exclusively peaceful means, a comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I would like first to pay tribute to my friend, Ambassador Dan Gillerman, as he prepares to leave New York after nearly six years as Israel's Permanent Representative. Ambassador Gillerman has distinguished himself by his diplomacy, his eloquence, his warmth and his wit. We wish him well. We also welcome the participation of the representative of Palestine.

We last met in a public setting to discuss the Middle East at the end of March, nearly four months ago, and much has happened since that time to raise hopes for progress in that troubled region. In this debate today, I believe it is important to outline the progress that has been achieved, identify the challenges that remain and focus on how the international community can help the parties to achieve the goal of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

In terms of the positive developments of the past few months, we welcome the progress that the Israelis and Palestinians continue to make in their bilateral negotiations, addressing all the core issues between them. Achieving a peaceful two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key priority for the United States, and we remain committed to achieving a peace agreement before the end of the year.

Since the parties have rightly maintained the confidentiality of their discussions, progress towards that goal may not always be visible, but we must not mistake that for lack of progress. We welcome our European partners' strong support for the process, as demonstrated at the recent Paris Summit for the

Mediterranean, and look forward to continued international cooperation, working through the Quartet in support of dialogue between the parties.

We are also working hard to support the parties' efforts to improve security for Palestinians and Israelis and humanitarian conditions for the Palestinians. United States-trained police officers have deployed to Jenin, in coordination with Israeli authorities, and are working to uphold law and order and crack down on terrorism. We applaud their efforts to restore order and confiscate illicit weapons in difficult circumstances. We also support the Egyptian efforts to restore calm to Gaza and southern Israel, and call on all parties to adhere to the period of calm that began on 19 June.

Like our partners in the Quartet, we welcome the announcement of indirect talks between Israel and Syria, under the auspices of Turkey, and hope that progress is made in that direction.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, we welcome the Doha agreement, which led to the election of Michel Sleiman as President, and the recent formation of a national unity Government. We also welcome the recent announcement in Paris that Syria and Lebanon have agreed to exchange diplomatic missions.

Despite the progress of the past few months, we continue to confront significant challenges on the path to peace. The security situation remains tense. Today, several civilians were injured in Jerusalem when a Palestinian construction worker rammed his truck into a bus and three passenger cars in a reminder of the deadly attack that took place earlier in July. We condemn all attacks targeting civilians and call for them to end permanently. We also call for a restoration of the lawful Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority is in a dire situation financially and will face a budget deficit of over $750 million in 2008 if additional budget support is not provided, which could impair its ability to deliver much-needed services to the Palestinian people.

We also reiterate our deep concern at continuing Israeli settlement activity. We call on Israel to freeze settlement activity and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, consistent with its road map obligations. Settlement activity is having a negative effect on the atmosphere for negotiations and has the potential to harm those negotiations going forward.

With regard to the challenges in Lebanon, events in early May demonstrated yet again the serious threat posed by armed militias outside the control of the State. We remain concerned about persistent reports of breaches of the arms embargo, and we are particularly disturbed by statements by Hizbollah that it has rebuilt its military capacity since the 2006 war.

The international community has a role in supporting the efforts of the parties to reach a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. For example, when the Quartet meets again in September at the General Assembly, it will consider, after further consultation with the parties, the timing and agenda of an international meeting in Moscow to lend support to the process launched in Annapolis. The Quartet is playing a key role in supporting the efforts of the parties through coordinated international engagement and should continue its work in that regard.

On the financial front, we urge the international community, especially regional partners, to increase their efforts to support the Palestinian Authority. The United States has delivered on much of our $555 million pledge made in Paris last December to help meet Palestinian humanitarian needs, including $150 million in direct budgetary support.

We commend the assistance provided to the Palestinian Authority by many European partners, as well as by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria and Kuwait, and urge others to increase their commitments. We also support efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of Gazans, including a steady and sufficient supply of fuel to Gaza, and the immediate resumption of United Nations and other donor projects there.

Turning to Lebanon, the international community must continue to work towards the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) and the Doha agreement in order to safeguard Lebanon's independence and security. We must also continue to strongly support the efforts of the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces to restore calm and support the legitimate Government of Lebanon. We also call on outside parties to cease arming illegal militias in Lebanon.

As part of the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we welcome the Secretary-General's intention to strengthen the diplomatic process aimed at dealing with the issue of the Shaba'a farms, and urge

him to engage directly with Israel, Lebanon and Syria on that issue. We also strongly support the work of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission and look forward to the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

In conclusion, although much remains to be done to achieve our common goal of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, one can take heart that we are moving in the right direction. With responsible, coordinated and effective support from the international community, we can help the parties secure the peace that has eluded them for so long. The United States stands ready to do its part towards that goal.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Viet Nam.

I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his detailed briefing.

We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As Ambassador Gillerman is leaving us, I wish him all the best in his future professional and personal life.

Since the Council last held an open debate under this agenda item almost a year ago, the situation in the Middle East has witnessed the emergence of a broad spectrum of new opportunities and new challenges. Positive developments include the engagement of Israel and Palestine in negotiations on final status issues, the strong support pledged at the international conferences held in Paris, Bethlehem and Berlin for the establishment of a Palestinian State, and the high-level diplomacy initiatives and mediation efforts of the Quartet, the League of Arab States and regional countries.

Alongside the tangible progress reached among Israel and relevant parties on ceasefires, prisoner exchanges and other areas of mutual concern, the further steps undertaken by the Palestinian Authority to enhance national unity, security and rule of law, promote foreign investment and pursue socio-economic development reforms can also be mentioned.

Notwithstanding those developments, the Middle East situation remains complex and volatile. Among worrisome realities have been Israel's continued military incursions into the West Bank, its plan to expand illegal settlements in the Palestinian territory, its ongoing construction of the separation wall, its imposition of closures and restrictions on freedom of movement and access to persons and goods in Gaza, and its continued detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

Equally serious are the fact that the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to deteriorate in all aspects and double its impact on the lives of the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for months from the lack of food and medical supplies; the suspension of electricity and fuel supplies; the halting of services in hospitals; the withholding of heating supplies in winter; and the paralysed functioning of sanitation and water facilities.

The Middle East conflict has been going on for too long. If there is a lesson that must be learned from that, it is that wanton bloodshed produces no winners. Peaceful negotiations remain the only means to achieve the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians to an end to occupation and an independent sovereign State of their own; those of Arab States to reclaiming occupied territories; and those of Israel to sustainable security.

Viet Nam calls upon the parties concerned to renounce violence, implement hard-earned agreements, abide scrupulously by their obligations under international law — particularly human rights and humanitarian laws — and take further concrete action to advance the peace process towards its stated goals on the basis of United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative and the Annapolis outcome.

We urge Israel to put an end to restrictive measures, open border crossings and ensure unfettered access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza.

We underline the importance of the continued support of the international community, especially the United Nations, the Quartet and regional countries for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Regarding Lebanon, in light of the positive political atmosphere created by the signing of the Doha agreement and the ongoing mediation efforts of the League of Arab States and regional countries, we urge all parties in Lebanon to build on the momentum of national reconciliation and extend their full support to the newly established national unity Government. We also urge them to search for compromise solutions to promote the country's political stability, socio-economic development and regional and international integration.

While continuing to support the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we urge the parties concerned to put an end to those acts that are complicating this process, including targeted attacks against Lebanese civilians and United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon personnel, Israeli air violations and the continued detention of prisoners, and to resolve the issue of the status of the Shaba'a farms, thus helping to assert Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, promote its stability, and contribute to an improved political and security environment in the region.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month.

I would like to thank your predecessor, the representative of the United States, for his efforts during the United States' presidency of the Council last month.

I would also like to express my great appreciation for the briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, concerning developments in the Middle East, particularly regarding the question of Palestine.

This year, the situation in the Middle East brings many things to mind. It is the sixtieth anniversary of the Palestinian disaster and the forced displaced of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. We had great hopes that this year would end with the announcement of the independent Palestinian on Palestinian soil, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and with the enablement of the Palestinians to exercise their right to return, which is the basic condition for the establishment of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

That was the hope, but what is the reality? The twentieth century witnessed a number of serious attempts to achieve comprehensive peace. In 1991, the Madrid Conference was held under United States and Soviet auspices. It was followed by the Oslo Agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis. A number of agreements and understandings followed.

We are almost at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and the attempts are still continuing. In 2002, Arab leaders launched the Arab peace initiative at the Beirut Conference, emphasizing the same outcome at the various successive summits. The 2003 road map added another term of reference for the Palestinian-Israeli path, followed by the Annapolis Conference, which renewed hopes of reaching a peaceful agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis before the end of this year.

There have thus been many initiatives, but what is required are not miracles; what is required will continue to be an obligation to commit to the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the implementation of international resolutions and the adoption of the Arab peace initiative.

In Paris on 13 July, the Israeli Prime Minister was optimistic about reaching an agreement with the Palestinians, but Palestinian land is still being torn apart, the Gaza Strip is still under siege and its people are still being collectively punished. The policy of the confiscation of lands in the West Bank, the establishment of checkpoints and the separation wall still go on. Worst of all, settlement activity continues; hence the Arab Group's initiative to submit a draft resolution to the Council aimed at stopping Israeli settlement activities, which are the main impediment to the peace process. We call on the Security Council once again to uphold the values and norms of international law and the rule of law by adopting the draft resolution.

From Lebanon, I bring good news. On 21 May, through an initiative of the League of Arab States under the auspices of Qatar, the Lebanese leadership reached an agreement in Doha. On 25 May, General Michel Sleiman was elected President of the Republic by the Lebanese parliament. His presidential speech was welcomed by all Lebanese in Lebanon and abroad. That was great news for the country. Last week, a national unity Government was formed by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and will be presented soon through a ministerial declaration. Work on parliamentary elections will soon begin.

In order to pursue dialogue and promote the sovereignty of the State, it will be necessary to negotiate some controversial issues. We note the intention of the President of the Republic, Mr. Michel Sleiman, to visit Syria on the basis of an invitation from President Bashar Al-Assad to discuss all fraternal matters and pending issues between the two countries. That announcement was made at a meeting of the two Presidents in Paris hosted by President Nicolas Sarkozy on the resumption of diplomatic relations, a matter which the two countries must follow up.

Two weeks ago was the second anniversary of the Israeli war against Lebanon, waged to recover two soldiers who had been abducted. In two weeks, it will be the second anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). In these two years, very important steps were taken concerning the deployment of the Lebanese army in the South and cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in order to establish security and stability in the South. The last of those steps was the exchange of Lebanese prisoners of war held in Israeli prisons for the two Israeli soldiers, whom Lebanon returned under the auspices of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. To Mr. Ban we offer great thanks and our deepest gratitude.

A lot has been said about those exchanges. What is important is the return of Lebanon's citizens and the turning of a painful page in our history. National solidarity has been demonstrated through the reception of the prisoners of war and the remains of the fallen. In exchange of prisoners was another step towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and here we would like to emphasize the continued technical cooperation between Lebanon and the United Nations in monitoring the Syrian-Lebanese borders, where an independent working group for the observation of the border has been installed.

Lebanon views the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) as crucial despite the fact that the Minister of Defence of Israel, Mr. Ehud Barak, has stated that the resolution has not and will not be implemented. It is true that the resolution has not been implemented, but it is true because Israel has not implemented many of its provisions. For example, Israel continues to violate Lebanese airspace. More than 20 violations a day — an unprecedented number — were reported by the Secretary-General in his seventh report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Civilians in southern Lebanon are still held hostage by mines and cluster bombs that were planted by Israel. After two years of calls for maps showing where those bombs have been laid, Israel has offered only two years of flagrant refusal and objections.

Who will return six-year old Ali Dakduk to his mother and his family after he was killed by deadly Israeli cluster bombs? Who will stop the series of deaths caused by Israel in the houses, fields and farms of southern Lebanon? Dozens of innocent civilians have been killed by such bombs. Israel continues its occupation of the village of Ghajar, the Shaba'a Farms and the Kfar Shouba Hills. We emphasize here the importance of immediate and unconditional withdrawal from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and of finding an appropriate solution for the Israeli occupation of the Shaba'a Farms.

Returning to Mr. Barak's assertion that resolution 1701 (2006) would not be implemented, that remark proves Israel's intention not to implement it. Unfortunately, that is consistent with Israel's history, since it is known for ignoring international resolutions and refusing to implement them. The latest violation of resolution 1701 (2006) is Israel's continued disruption of the communication network in southern Lebanon and the distribution of letters threatening and intimidating civilians. We have already reported those new violations of the security and freedom of Lebanese citizens to the Council.

Lebanon aspires through international legitimacy and resolutions to retrieving its occupied land and to restoring stability in the South. It looks to international legitimacy to bring about justice and to put an end to the immunity of criminals who have tried to terrorize Lebanese citizens and destabilize their security and their country.

With regard to the ongoing special investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Mr. Daniel Bellemare continues his work as Commissioner of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission. The administrative and logistical steps taken to establish the Special Tribunal for Lebanon have advanced through some very important stages. We would like to thank donor States for their contributions to the budget of the Commission and the ongoing work of the Secretariat in that area.

Once again, it is quite clear that there is no stability in our region and no security for its people. Indeed, there will be no peace for the people in our region except on the basis of respect for the provisions of international law and the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy and legality, especially those of the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, upon the assumption by your friendly country, Viet Nam, of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. For us, Viet Nam is a symbol of sacrifice as well as of the struggle against foreign occupation and colonialism. It is also a symbol of the victory of right and justice over injustice.

I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his very valuable briefing. I align myself with the statement to be made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I would like to seize this opportunity to thank all those who spoke before the Council today and referred to the importance of the proximity talks between my country, Syria, and Israel.

We thank the President for giving us the opportunity to speak before the Security Council in the framework of its monthly discussion of the situation in the Middle East. We are full of hope that the Security Council can consider all the issues on its agenda, and in particular, the question of the Middle East, leading to the end of the foreign occupation of our Arab land and to the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace in the region.

At the summit held in March in Damascus, Arab leaders emphasized the importance of working to bring about a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East based on the relevant international resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab peace initiative. The process seeks the restoration of Arab rights, the return of Palestinian refugees and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with its capital Al-Quds, and full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 and from the remaining occupied Lebanese land.

Despite the fact that proximity talks have begun between Syria and Israel through a Turkish mediator — negotiations that aim at exploring intentions and at finding common ground for moving on to direct negotiations at a later stage — the sudden adoption by the Israeli Knesset of a reckless resolution stipulating that if two thirds of its members approve or provide for any attempt to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan, the proposal must then go to a general referendum, runs counter to the goal of establishing a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

In parallel, Israel's unprecedented refusal to respond to international legitimacy on the Israeli-Palestinian track and on Israeli settlement policies in the occupied Arab territory, as well as the military training exercises it continuously undertakes, show clearly that Israel is not serious about seeking peace. It is continuing its occupation, aggression, settlement-building, military escalation and provocation, rejecting the elements of peace that are supported by the entire international community.

Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its hostile and aggressive policies against the Palestinian people despite the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip. Extrajudicial killings have continued, as have the starvation, injustice, coercion, collective punishment, confiscation of land, human rights violations, compulsory expulsions and displacements and the closure of crossing points. The latter has turned Gaza into the largest prison in the world, preventing the population from getting the basic needs of life and impeding the humanitarian assistance work of international organizations. Israel has even been trying to reduce the question of Palestine from a question of the just struggle of a suppressed and repressed people living under occupation to a matter of merely providing humanitarian services such as ensuring supplies of food, electricity, medication and water for the besieged Palestinian people.

What is even worse is that certain international parties have sought to justify those aberrant Israeli measures and have prevented the international community, and the Council in particular, from taking measures to stop those violations.

We would like to point out that the United Nations Charter does not give any State whatsoever the right to violate the rights of civilians under occupation on the pretext of self-defence. The Charter lays down specific and clear legal obligations for every occupying Power vis-à-vis such people, both from the humanitarian point of view and regarding all other aspects under international law.

The situation has deteriorated because of the illegal repressive measures taken by Israel to expel Palestinians from their homeland and to confiscate their land, as well as its plans to continue expanding its settlements and building the apartheid separation wall, in violation of the provisions of international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Those violations seriously require us to hold the Israeli Government to account before the international community.

The international community, including the Security Council, should shoulder its clear responsibilities in this context. It should take concrete and immediate measures to implement international law, setting aside policies of double standards, thus restoring the role of the Council in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Council's inability to halt Israeli settlements in the occupied territory over the past few weeks because of the objection of one delegation, specifically concerning the draft resolution submitted on this matter by the Arab Group, regrettably reflects policies that experience has shown to be a failure and indicates a lack of respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter.

The situation of Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan is not very different to that of the Palestinians. The occupying Power is still violating the private property of Syrian citizens in the Golan, confiscating land, plundering the natural wealth and water of the Golan, burying toxic nuclear waste and expanding illegal settlements in that area.

Israel continues its repressive policies against Syrian citizens, unlawfully confirming them in jails and detention centres in conditions that expose them to the danger of death. Israel continues to violate the rights of Syrian prisoners of war (POWs) in Israeli detention centres, which has led to a decline in the health of Syrian POW Bushr al-Muqt. The Syrian Government has called on the Secretary-General and on the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international organizations to intervene to save his life.

Once again, Syria calls upon the Council and the United Nations to put pressure on Israel to release all Syrian POWs without delay, some of whom have been in prison for 25 years, including the Syrian journalist Atta Farhat, who was arrested by Israel while working as a journalist. Israel, the occupying Power, is a signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which makes it imperative for Israel to implement its provisions.

To give some credibility to this discussion, Syria calls upon the Council to place pressure on Israel to permit without delay the resumption of family visits by Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan to their country, Syria, through the Quneitra crossing point. Twenty-seven years on, we are still awaiting mechanisms for the implementation of Council resolution 497 (1981), rejecting the Israeli decision to annex the occupied Syrian Golan and holding the occupation null and void.

Syria, which has repeatedly emphasized peace as a strategic option on the basis of the outcome of the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative, would like to stress again that peace and security will not be achieved in the region without an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Golan and Lebanon.

In that context, we would like to emphasize again the important role of the Security Council in ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories through the implementation of its resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

We would have liked the Permanent Representative of Israel to have ended his tenure at the United Nations with some reflection on what he has done, awakening an awareness that would bring his country nearer to peace, instead of showing disdain and trying to falsify history in a theatrical manner that is not convincing to anyone.

The Israeli representative talked about the contributions of Member States to international civilization, but he did not speak of what his country has contributed since its creation by this international Organization. He forgot to mention what his country has contributed through massacres in Deir Yassin, Sabra, Shatila, Hebron, Jenin, Nablus, Qana, Beit Hanoun, Gaza, Bahr al-Baqar and many other places. Israel has been condemned a record number of times by the General Assembly, the Security Council and the

Human Rights Council. Also, it holds a record number of vetoes cast by an influential State in the Council to protect it, a record number of 44.

The General Assembly considers foreign occupation to be the worst kind of terrorism and the worst kind of injustice. Thus, the continuation of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the worst kind of terrorism. Israel has assassinated the largest number of Palestinian children, such as Mohammed al-Durra, Huda Ghalia and nine-year-old Emam al-Hams, the schoolchild whom an Israeli soldier killed with 30 bullets.

Israel was the closest partner of the apartheid regime in South Africa when the regime was imprisoning the freedom fighter Nelson Mandela. Israel was among the first in the world to engage in air piracy, doing so against a Syrian civilian aircraft in 1955. In 1973, Israel was the first to shoot down a civilian passenger plane, a Libyan aircraft, killing 108 passengers. In 1968, Israel destroyed the Lebanese air passenger fleet on Lebanese soil. Israel has been the world's biggest aggressor against peacekeeping forces; according to former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, that aggression has been deliberate.

There is no clash of cultures or within a culture, nor between civilizations or within a civilization. The clash has always been between colonialists and peoples aspiring to freedom. The Arab-Islamic culture so despised by the Israeli Ambassador is that which gave Jews their own philosopher, Moses Maimonides, to take pride in. Maimonides was a student of the Arab-Islamic philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi. After his expulsion from Andalusia, Maimonides was welcomed by Arabs in Morocco and Egypt. Arab-Islamic culture, represented by the philosopher Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes, was the first in history to try to reconcile reason and religion. Arab-Islamic culture, which gave Ibn Khaldun to the world, established the science of sociology. Some 35 per cent of the space- and astronomy-related terminology used around the world derives from the Arabic language and Arab scientific discoveries.

In 1967, Israel destroyed the espionage vessel *USS Liberty* because it had recorded orders given to Israeli officers to kill Egyptian prisoners of war by burying them alive.

The representative of Israel described for us his vision of life in Israel. Let us imagine life in the occupied Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories when Israeli F-16s bomb civilian vehicles and kill their occupants, or when an Israeli military vessel fires on Palestinians on the Gaza shore, killing entire Palestinian families. Let us try also to imagine the staff member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) who, seeking to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza, is stopped at Israeli checkpoints and prevented from rendering that assistance to those in need. Let us imagine children studying in UNRWA schools in Gaza when their building is completely destroyed by gunfire, indiscriminately killing and injuring the students inside.

I do not wish to go on at great length. Perhaps we should consider building a museum to commemorate Israel's record-breaking behaviour so that people will remember what it has done and history will live on in our memories.

The President: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his kind words about Viet Nam's presidency of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the 118 States members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the Movement, to congratulate you, Sir, and your entire team on your outstanding presidency of the Council.

At your request, I shall try to shorten my statement and shall circulate the text of the full version.

The situation in the Middle East remains complex. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continues to deteriorate and to be marked by deadly violence, instability and high tension. In grave breach of international law and in contradiction of the peace process, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to carry out military attacks against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where the isolated and imprisoned Palestinian civilian population continues to suffer a dire humanitarian crisis.

The Movement reiterates that the occupying Power's lack of respect for international law and ongoing illegal occupation continue to be the major obstacles to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. In that connection, the Movement reiterates its profound regret that, for more than 41 years, the Palestinian people have suffered under the brutal Israeli military occupation and colonization and that they continue to be denied their fundamental human rights.

The Movement reiterates its call on Israel to cease all its violations against the Palestinian people and to abide scrupulously by its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.

This month marks the fourth anniversary of the rendering by the International Court of Justice of the Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. The Court, the highest judicial organ of the United Nations system, affirmed that the construction of the wall is illegal and that Israel is under obligation to terminate its breaches of international law, to cease its construction of the wall, to dismantle the wall, and to make reparations for all damage caused by the construction of the wall.

Israel, in violation of numerous Security Council resolutions regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the illegality of the Israeli settlements; in further violation of General Assembly resolutions; and in contravention of the Advisory Opinion and of General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, continues to build the wall, to impose an associated permit regime, and to expand its illegal settlements.

In flagrant defiance of the ruling and of international law, Israel has completed approximately 60 per cent of the planned 701 kilometres of the wall and has continued to confiscate even more Palestinian land, to destroy property and to displace more Palestinian civilians.

The Movement is concerned by the huge physical, economic and social devastation caused by those illegal and destructive colonization practices, which are dividing the occupied Palestinian territory into separate, walled-in enclaves and severing East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory, completely undermining the unity, integrity and contiguity of the Palestinian territory, destroying entire communities, displacing thousands of Palestinian civilians, and isolating tens of thousands more Palestinians in isolated cantons.

In flagrant violation of international law, despite commitments made in the context of the Middle East peace process and agreements reached therein, and contrary to the spirit and goals of the renewed peace process, Israeli has stepped up its illegal settlement activities. The members of the Non-Aligned Movement have submitted a letter to the President of the Security Council, urging the Council to seriously address that critical issue, including through the adoption of a resolution.

The Movement reiterates its condemnation of all Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, stresses the dangers of such continuing illegal and unilateral Israeli measures, and reiterates its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement construction, expansion and planning.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation in its territory following Israel's brutal aggression and serious violations of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its satisfaction at the steps undertaken by the Lebanese Government to implement resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement also welcomes the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces along the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon in order to ensure security and stability at the borders.

The NAM remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of the Blue Line in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). We strongly call on Israel to end the occupation of the northern part of Ghajar, on the northern side of the Blue Line, and to immediately refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006), as well as to refrain from any provocation of the Lebanese armed forces or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The NAM calls for the prompt settlement of the question of the Shaba'a farms in full respect for Lebanese territorial integrity, as stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006). We call upon all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area, and we note the important endeavours of the Secretary-General in this regard.

The NAM is acutely aware of the enormous challenge facing Lebanon as a result of the 1.2 million cluster bombs launched by Israel during its attack on that country. The Movement once again condemns the use of such weapons by Israel and deplores the death toll resulting from them. The NAM strongly calls upon Israel to provide the exact location of those deadly weapons and to provide maps of landmines planted during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Movement congratulates the people and leaders of Lebanon and strongly supports the agreement reached in Doha on 21 May under the auspices of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of Qatar, pursuant to the efforts of the Ministerial Committee of the Arab League. The Doha agreement constituted an essential step towards the resolution of the current crisis, the return to the normal functioning of Lebanese democratic institutions, and the complete restoration of Lebanon's unity and stability.

In this regard, the Movement welcomes the election of the new President of the Republic and the establishment of a national unity Cabinet, and supports the agreement to address Lebanon's electoral law, in accordance with the Arab League initiative. The Movement also welcomes the decision to continue the national dialogue on ways to reinforce the authority of the State over all its territories, in such a way as to guarantee the sovereignty and the security of the State and the people of Lebanon. The Movement also welcomes the agreement to ban the use of weapons and violence as means to settle disputes, irrespective of their nature and under any circumstances.

The NAM reaffirms that all measures and action taken or to be taken by Israel which purport to alter the legal, physical and demographic condition or institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect.

We also reaffirm that all these measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter of the United Nations, resolutions including Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and are a challenge to the international community. The Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

I wish to conclude by expressing the Movement's hope that current efforts will bring an end to the occupation of all the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and that remain under its occupation, namely the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan, and that they will lead to the establishment of the independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as to a just solution of the question of the refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its support for the Middle East peace process, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his kind words about our presidency of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I also thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his briefing this morning.

I have the honour to address the Council on behalf of the Group of Arab States. I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's open debate as a part of a process that should continue until we attain a comprehensive and just settlement of the Middle East crisis based on the well-known terms of reference for peace, first and foremost among them Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In recent months we have witnessed much progress in strengthening the Middle East peace process that should put an end to the Israeli-Arab conflict, which poses a threat to international peace and security. In November 2007, the Annapolis conference gave fresh momentum to the peace process. The Arab Group and the Quartet continue their efforts, as does the Secretary-General, to strengthen the implementation of the Road Map, through a series of meetings. Indirect talks have begun between Syria and

Israel, under Turkish auspices, aimed at finding common ground so that direct negotiations can begin in the future.

But we regret that, at a time when we are speaking of these unique new opportunities to attain peace, and at a time when the Arab side is taking every opportunity to reaffirm its sincere commitment to peace, the Israeli side has opted for practices and policies in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, that feed the spiral of violence and escalation. That shows the absence of any sincere will or commitment to peace on the part of the Israeli Government. Despite the hundreds of international resolutions and appeals condemning the occupation and the settlement activities that have been undertaken since 1967 in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to ignore those resolutions and appeals. That is an insurmountable obstacle to the peace process.

On the question of the illegal settlements, only days ago Israel's Ministry of the Interior authorized the construction of 1,000 new housing units in the Jebel Abu Ghneim community in East Jerusalem and in other parts of the occupied Palestinian territories. Moreover, the Israeli authorities continue to build the illegal racist separation wall four years after the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which stipulated the illegality of the wall.

The consequence of this is serious harm to the Palestinian people. Israel and the international community must shoulder their responsibility and provide compensation. Israel's continued policies of siege, targeted assassination and the excessive use of force do not address threats to Israel's security. Those policies are harming international peace and security. All of this exacerbates the situation in the region. If the Israeli Government were serious about peace, it would end the expansion of settlements and the building of new ones and the construction of the separation wall.

The Israeli Government should cease using military force against civilians, should stop talking about its plans for invading Gaza, should open up crossing points to permit the free movement of people and goods, and should comply with the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. We call on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 July 1967 border. The Security Council must ensure that Israel complies with resolution 497 (1981), which rejects Israel's decision to annex the Golan and which has not been implemented since its adoption 27 years ago.

The Arab Group also expresses its solidarity with and support for the people and the Government of Lebanon within the framework of the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), which calls for the recovery of Lebanese lands still occupied by Israel, including the northern part of the village of al-Ghajar, the Shaba'a farms and the Kfar Shouba Hills. We reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority over its entire territory.

The Arab Group calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and force Israel to put an end to its daily violations of Lebanese airspace and its diversion of Lebanese water supplies. Israel must provide maps showing the locations of mines and cluster bombs, which have claimed many civilian lives. It must also cease its aggressive actions and implement the ceasefire. The Arab Group welcomes the release of Lebanese detainees from Israeli prisons. We thank the Secretary-General for his efforts in that regard.

In the Gaza Strip, the world is witnessing one of the worst humanitarian tragedies in history, caused by Israeli policies that have turned that area into an immense prison through outrageous acts of aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people, in flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. All of those acts, combined with the rise in global food prices and the inability of humanitarian workers to enter the Palestinian territory, are increasing the suffering of the Palestinian people.

These illegal practices by Israel, the occupying Power, are an affront to the efforts being made internationally, particularly those by the United States, to advance the peace process between Palestine and Israel. It is high time for serious pressure to be exerted on Israel to compel it to return to the peace process and take genuine measures in that regard — measures that go beyond attending meetings. As we call upon Israel to immediately end its aggression against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, we reiterate our appeal to the Council to deal with these challenges and to shoulder its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, in order to protect civilians from murder, destruction and human rights violations.

Once again, we call upon the Security Council to treat this crucial issue, which has serious regional and international repercussions, with the importance that it requires. The fact that the Council is standing idly by as a motionless observer of Israeli policies that run counter to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, particularly its illegal settlements policy, in no way serves the peace process.

At a time when the Security Council has no other choice but to adopt a draft resolution that would end the Israeli settlement policies, which run counter to the will of the international community and which threaten international peace and security, it must be recognized that the Arab Group has shown great flexibility with regard to the Arab draft resolution on the settlements in the occupied Arab territories; we have demonstrated a sincere desire to serve the peace process. Thus, it is the responsibility of Council members to echo those good intentions and to support that draft resolution, which emphasizes the illegal nature of those settlements under recognized international law.

Therefore, we reaffirm that, as everyone is aware, in the Middle East, as in any other region of the world, peace and stability cannot be imposed by force. Peace cannot be the outcome of policies of repression or exclusion. From that perspective, the Arab Group believes that the recent efforts by members and leaders of the League of Arab States, including Qatar, which assisted in bringing about the Doha agreement of 21 May 2008, helped to resolve the political crisis in Lebanon. Since Lebanon was able to reach that agreement, it has elected General Michel Sleiman as President of the Republic, a Government of national unity has been formed and an electoral law has been agreed upon. We note also that all relevant Lebanese actors have returned to the national dialogue, thereby preventing the use of force to settle internal political disputes.

Another element that has demonstrated the important role of neutral good offices is the Arab role, played in particular by the Governments of Yemen, Egypt and Syria, in narrowing the differences among Palestinians. Efforts were also made recently by the Arab Republic of Egypt to achieve a truce in the Gaza Strip last month — a truce that is currently being violated by Israel. All of this demonstrates that, as a regional institution, the Arab League has succeeded in playing a role supplementary to that of this Organization in maintaining international peace and security, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. It also demonstrates that dialogue is the only way to bring about a solution to the Middle East crisis. In particular, we see this in last week's exchange of Israeli and Lebanese prisoners.

The current situation underscores the need for the international community to make efforts and exert pressure in order to achieve a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Middle East crisis, at the heart of which is the Palestinian question, particularly with regard to, inter alia, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements and water, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. All of that was reaffirmed by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs during his briefing to the Council today.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that unjust occupation is one of the major causes of the scourge of terrorism, which targets innocent people and is spreading to the extent that it is becoming difficult to control. We must avoid comparing that scourge to the legitimate right of peoples to fight for freedom and liberation.

The President: There are a still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Therefore, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.30 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.50 p.m.

United Nations

S/PV.5940 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5940th meeting

Tuesday, 22 July 2008, 3.30 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Bui The Giang	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Kenes
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Zongo
	China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
	Costa Rica	Mr. Weisleder
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Kassianides
	Indonesia	Mr. Mulyana
	Italy	Mr. Trambajolo
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Mubarak
	Panama	Mr. De Vengoechea
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Bayley
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

The meeting resumed at 3.40 p.m.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I should like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Speakers with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in the Chamber and to deliver a condensed version when speaking.

I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to sincerely congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and to offer your predecessor our gratitude for his wise conduct of the work of the Council last month.

Jordan aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Arab Group and by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Today, Jordan would like to be the voice of logic and moderation before this august Council, as it always has been. After 60 years of conflict, it is neither possible nor acceptable to continue trading accusations, and it is neither possible nor acceptable for any party to claim a monopoly on the truth or to cast aspersions on the pivotal historic role that the Security Council has played regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Millions of people in the Middle East still look to the Council with hope. They still believe in its ability to exercise its basic function, the maintenance of international peace and security, on the basis of objectivity, neutrality and justice. Once our people stop thinking in such terms, our ability to keep events under control will be seriously compromised.

Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, only accepts positive dealings between and within the parties with a view to attaining peace in the region in a manner that will preserve the historical rights of the Palestinians to establish a viable, contiguous, independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in conformity with resolutions of international legitimacy adopted by the Council and at the same time, preserving the security of Israel. That positive option is not an impossible dream, but a strategic vision that can be implemented. The Annapolis Conference touched on that issue when it formulated a time frame for realizing that objective by the end of 2008. Only five months remain for that. The real challenge that today faces us all is how to make use of the remaining months of this year to attain that objective.

Jordan believes that reaching and implementing a peace agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis will dramatically change current trends in the Middle East and will give an important opportunity to change the strategic situation in the region for years to come. Failure to reach an agreement will only strengthen the positions of the forces opposed to peace in the region. The realization of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, the core of the conflict in the Middle East, is the key to solving other conflicts and will guarantee security and stability in the region. Consequently, the Israeli occupation must come to an end. There must be a just solution that realizes the aspirations of the Palestinian people to preserve their national identity through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, while also ensuring security for the people of Israel.

Achieving the desired peace requires that all concerned parties go seriously to the negotiating table on a clear basis. That should be accompanied by sincere efforts by the international Powers and forces to encourage both parties, Palestinians and Israelis, to fulfil their commitments and to reach comprehensive solutions to all problems to be addressed in a final settlement. In that context, Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II, pursues efforts in all areas to mobilize international support to lend impetus to the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis and to reach a peace agreement that will make possible the establishment of a Palestinian State before the end of this year, in accordance with what was agreed on at the Annapolis Conference and with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which constitutes the basis for dealing with every aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Success in the peace process requires that bridges of confidence and understanding be rebuilt and that there be real progress on the ground. Unilateral policies and the imposition of a de facto situation have failed in the past, and there is no reason to believe that such policies will enjoy any success in the future. Israeli plans to build new settlements in the occupied

Palestinian territories, especially in East Jerusalem, in addition to the expansion of existing settlements, are totally unacceptable and have been rejected. Those attempts to build a de facto situation constitute flagrant violations of international law and of Israel's obligations under the Road Map. They will also jeopardize the peace process and the future of the Palestinian State. The international community should intensify its efforts to urge Israel to put an immediate end to all settlement activities, including their natural growth. All people in the Middle East should look to the Security Council to assume its responsibility in putting an end to those plans.

The situation in Gaza is at its worst ever. We remain worried about the deteriorating humanitarian and living situation of our Palestinian brothers there. Jordan will pursue all possible efforts and contacts with all international and regional parties to urge them to work towards putting an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza and to provide the assistance that will help to improve their living conditions and put an end to the deterioration of the situation. The political negotiations required at this stage should result in immediate steps by Israel to alleviate the daily suffering of the Palestinian people, including by lifting the blockade and the closures, which have a devastating political, economic, social and psychological impact on the Palestinian people.

Jordan reiterates its full and constant support to the legitimate Palestinian leadership, represented by the Palestinian Authority and its President, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. We stress the need for the international community to provide the support and assistance that Mr. Abbas and the Palestinians need in their efforts to establish a democratic political regime, strengthen the work of the Palestinian national institutions and build responsible, transparent institutions, including security institutions. The international community must contribute by supporting Mr. Abbas in reviving the Palestinian economy, improving the living conditions and the environment for investments and developing a free and prosperous economy. Palestinians are currently in a difficult situation and need support to establish an independent Palestinian State on their national soil.

In conclusion, putting an end to violence and achieving peace is not the responsibility of one party and not the other. In that respect, we totally reject the targeting and killing of innocent civilians on both sides, whether Palestinian or Israeli. Such acts are obstacles to the success of the peace process. They also foment violence, which leads to more hatred, killing, destruction and extremism. In that respect, we reiterate Jordan's support for the efforts of the regional and international parties to help the Palestinians and Israelis resume the negotiation process. We also recognize the importance of the role of the Quartet and its representative, Mr. Tony Blair, in crystallizing and implementing the message of peace that the peoples of the region expect from this Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Following the Annapolis summit of last November, the peace process between Israel and the Palestine Authority gained new impetus in defining the final goal of the peace process and the path that the parties should follow to reach it.

However, the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, the policy of restriction on movement of Palestinians in the West Bank, the ongoing building of the wall of separation within the boundaries of the Green Line, the closure of the border crossings to Gaza, which has created an alarming humanitarian situation, and continuous Palestinian terrorist attacks in Jerusalem are impeding the trust that is necessary between the parties to reach a peace agreement.

The resolve of Israeli and Palestine Authority leaders to reach a possible peace agreement, which was demonstrated this month in Paris during the Union for the Mediterranean summit, gives us hope for the future. We remain convinced that a lasting peace cannot be achieved without negotiations between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. That is why we welcome the beginning of proximity peace talks between Syria and Israel under the auspices of Turkey.

At the same time, we welcome the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. We also believe that another step forward is the Doha agreement, which facilitated the election of the Lebanese President and the establishment of a unity cabinet. All of that is necessary to ensure the authority of the Lebanese State over all its territory. That is why we stress compliance by all States of the region with the provisions of 1701 (2006), which establishes an arms embargo on and the disarming of Lebanese militias.

The Argentine Republic will not tolerate the activities of terrorists or those who harbour them. We therefore call on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to begin its work as soon as possible so as to ensure that the perpetrators of the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri do not go unpunished, because we believe that there can be no lasting peace without a foundation of justice.

We reiterate the commitment of the Argentine Government to a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions, the reactivation of the regional dimension of the peace process, the elements of the road map and the new dynamism generated by the Annapolis Conference.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this timely open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We appreciate the fact that non-members of the Security Council are regularly afforded an opportunity to address that issue. My appreciation goes also to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive and informative briefing this morning.

Over the past few months, there have been positive developments in the Middle East. We welcome the continuing efforts to advance the Annapolis track. The international community should continue to support the efforts of the parties concerned to reach an agreement by the end of this year.

We highly appreciate the active diplomatic efforts that countries in the region have been making. As a result of such efforts, indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria have resumed under the auspices of Turkey, the Doha agreement was reached in May with the mediation of the relevant Arab countries, and a new cabinet was formed in Lebanon.

At the Hokkaido Toyako Summit, the leaders of the Group of Eight reiterated their commitment to realizing a comprehensive peace in the region. The Paris Summit for the Mediterranean also provided valuable support for the parties concerned.

The situation in the Middle East, however, remains fragile and much still needs to be done. We believe that progress on the Palestinian track, which is the core issue in the Middle East peace process, will lead to peace between Israel and its neighbours and eventually to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East as a whole.

A peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians should be achieved as soon as possible. We hope that peaceful coexistence and prosperity for the Israeli and the Palestinian people will thereby be realized. We call on all parties to make every effort to that end by showing maximum restraint and good faith in the bilateral negotiations, to refrain from any action that would undermine the negotiations and the momentum for peace, and to implement their road map obligations such as ending all acts of violence, terrorism and incitement. We reiterate the call on Israel to freeze all settlement activities and the construction of houses in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Japan welcomes the truce that took effect in Gaza recently through the mediation of Egypt and calls for it to be observed. At the same time, we remain concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The integrity of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip should soon be restored under the leadership of President Abbas. We support the reform efforts of the Palestinian Authority, including the training of the security forces. In that connection, we call on Israel to take further steps to ensure movement and access.

On 2 July, Foreign Minister Koumura of Japan hosted the third round of the ministerial meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative, with the participation of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Japan. The four parties then issued a press statement welcoming the developments made so far and stating how they were looking forward to future progress.

The feasibility study on the agro-industrial park in Jericho will be completed in November and projects to develop basic infrastructure will move into the implementation stage as early as next year. We strongly believe that this initiative will help build confidence between the two sides by contributing to the creation of a viable Palestinian economy and will ultimately give Palestinian youth hope for a productive future.

Japan welcomes the formation of the new cabinet headed by Prime Minister Siniora. We hope that, under the leadership of President Sleiman, all parties concerned in Lebanon will continue to engage in dialogue with a view to enhancing the stability and political independence of the country.

To achieve stability in Lebanon, it is essential that Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) be fully implemented. We therefore welcome the recent exchange of prisoners by Israel and Hizbollah as a step towards reducing tensions and building confidence, and extend our sincere condolences to the families of the deceased.

However, much remains to be done by parties in the region, including all Lebanese parties concerned and Israel, in order to achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution. They must vigorously continue to disarm and disband all remaining militias, to delineate the borders of Lebanon, including the Shaba'a Farms, and to ensure that there is no illegal trafficking of weapons. We welcome the recent comment of President Assad that Syria is ready for the reciprocal establishment of embassies in Syria and Lebanon.

Japan decided recently to extend financial support to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We hope that it will assist in the efforts to fulfil its intended goal.

In conclusion, Japan remains fully committed to providing all possible support in the hope of achieving progress in the peace process.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I express to you, Sir, my most heartfelt congratulations on your outstanding presidency of the Security Council for this month of July 2008. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to all Council members for having allowed me to participate, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in this public debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Almost eight months after the Annapolis Conference, the holding and outcome of which were welcomed by our Committee, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, still remains grim. However, the Committee did not hesitate to give its full support to that initiative, which was aimed at obtaining agreement by the parties on final status by the end of this year. Accordingly, the Committee's programme of work for the current year, 2008, is geared towards supporting the creation of a climate conducive to the advancement of permanent status negotiations between the parties, including, particularly, the complete cessation of all acts of violence.

That positive dynamic was echoed by the participants in the three international meetings that our Committee has organized in recent months: the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in February in Amman, Jordan; the United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees, held in April at UNESCO headquarters in Paris; and the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in June in Malta.

As a prerequisite for successful negotiations between Israel and Palestine, tangible changes must occur on the ground in accordance with the parties' obligations under the first phase of the Quartet's Road Map. Our Committee is seriously concerned over Israel's ongoing settlement policy, which contradicts all of the obligations set forth in the Road Map. The very presence of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is a violation of international law. The expansion and consolidation of large settlements in and around Jerusalem, especially in the E-1 area, raises serious doubts about Israel's good faith in these negotiations.

In fact, since the Annapolis Conference, the Israeli authorities have announced plans to build more than 3,000 apartments in and around Jerusalem, and the construction of some 300 new buildings has already begun, according to reports of the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now. These settlement blocks, together with the wall being built by Israel, sever Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, which it cuts into two parts, thus forming an enormous challenge to the permanent status negotiations.

The Committee calls upon Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity and to dismantle settlement outposts. Four years after the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice declaring the separation wall illegal under international law and insisting on its removal, Israel stubbornly continues construction of the wall on Palestinian land. The Committee calls upon the international community, and the Council in particular, to take more serious action to challenge the presence of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory.

With regard to Jerusalem, it is the Committee's position that a negotiated solution based on international law is critical for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for establishing lasting peace in the entire region. No agreement that does not include East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian State can help bring about a sustained settlement to the conflict.

Israel's ongoing settlement activity in Jerusalem and the discriminatory measures taken against Palestinian residents of the city are in clear violation of resolution 252 (1968), which stated that

> "all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, including expropriation of land and properties thereon, which tend to change to change the legal status of Jerusalem are invalid and cannot change that status". (*para. 2*)

Our Committee welcomes the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, which went into effect last month. The parties must do their utmost to respect the ceasefire and it should be extended to the West Bank without delay.

The humanitarian situation remains critical. The crossings into Gaza are not opened frequently enough to provide the minimum basic necessities to the population. The Committee reiterates that Israel, as the occupying Power, is obligated under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect civilians under its occupation and is responsible for providing basic services such as food and medical care and for ensuring the overall welfare of the population. The applicability of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory has been repeatedly confirmed by the Conference of High Contracting Parties, the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The Gaza Strip is no exception, with Israel fully controlling every aspect of the daily life of the population. Through me, the Committee again urges the Council to take robust, urgent action to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to meet its responsibilities as guardian of international peace and security by upholding its own resolutions, which continue to be flouted by Israel: resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Mr. President, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to you for having convened this meeting, which gives the opportunity for many of us not represented on this body to address the Council on an issue of grave importance which affects the state of international peace and security. In this regard, my delegation aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We should recall that June this year marked the sixtieth year of the dispossession of Palestine refugees. Last year was the commemoration of the fortieth year of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, which is on record as the longest occupation in modern history. In view of that background, there is an unmistakable and pervasive view among many developing countries that certain members of the Council have been selective in their approach in tackling issues relating to international peace and security. The Security Council has adopted various resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) 338 (1973). The lack of action on the part of the Council to enforce those resolutions bears negatively on the credibility of this body.

My delegation recognizes the significance of recent developments, including the Gaza truce and last week's prisoner exchange. We hope that those developments will contribute to the Middle East peace process, in which the Palestine-Israel conflict represents the core issue. Last November, Malaysia was among those present in Annapolis that shared a sense of optimism that some progress was possible towards a solution to the conflict. Developments since then, however, have dashed that optimism. It is indeed difficult to maintain the hope that we are nearer to realizing the vision of a viable, territorially contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

In particular, my delegation wishes to highlight the fact that the ongoing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, despite the undertakings that Israel has made, including in Annapolis, is a major impediment to the peace process. The Council simply cannot stand by idle, for doing so would amount to condoning and abetting the Israeli confiscation of Palestinian territories. To prod the

Middle East peace process in the right direction, the Security Council must ensure that Israel complies with the Council's resolutions.

It is not possible to equate the responsibilities of Palestinians and Israelis for achieving a solution to the problem. Israel is the occupier. Israel bears responsibility as the occupying Power under international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. The time is long overdue for Israel to cease its policy of imposing collective punishment on the population of Gaza. Israel should halt all its human rights violations and illegal actions and respect international law. In that connection, I wish to recall the words contained in Israel's Declaration of Independence, which lays out the moral foundation of the State:

> "We extend our hand to all neighbouring States and their peoples in an offer of peace and good-neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East."

In 2002, the Arab countries, through the Arab League's peace proposal, offered peace and normal relations with Israel in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, its acceptance of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and its agreement to a just solution of the Palestinian refugee problem. That is in line with Security Council resolution 242 (1967), yet Israel has not grasped that offer for peace.

This time, the international community must ensure that the present peace efforts do not fail. The consequences of an unravelling of the peace process would be devastating, the prospects for peacemaking in the future would dim, and the region would sink into further turmoil.

Ultimately, the current peace efforts should bring an end to the occupation of all the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 — the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan — and lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution to the question of the refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). That will be possible only if the Security Council implements its resolution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Sadeghi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to join other speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your able stewardship of the Council's work this month and in thanking you for having convened this open debate in order to address the grave situation in the Middle East and the unspeakable plight of the Palestinian people. I also avail myself of this opportunity to thank Mr. Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for briefing the Security Council on the subject matter before us today.

In the period under review, as on every other day in the past six decades, the Palestinian people were subjected to the daily brutalities of the Israeli regime, which has continued to systematically violate the Palestinians' most basic, legitimate and inalienable rights. While the Israeli regime hypocritically speaks of peace, in practice it has persisted in and even increased its abhorrent crimes against the innocent Palestinians and others in the region. As realities on the ground abundantly suggest, its systematic pattern of human rights violations and massive breaches of international law and international humanitarian law have continued unabated.

The continuation of military operations against Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly the most recent inhumane and criminal Israeli acts against schools, medical centres and other civilian institutions in the West Bank, and the imposition of a humanitarian crisis on the entire population of the Gaza Strip through closures and restrictions on movement and access of persons and goods, even humanitarian and medical necessities, have once again highlighted the gross violation of the most basic human rights and the fundamental principles of international law by the Israeli regime. During the period under review and as a consequence of the Israeli military campaign, the human and material losses inflicted on the Palestinian people continued to rise. A case in point is the continuation of the brutal blockade of the Gaza Strip that has made the lives of the innocent Palestinians living there unbearable.

Four years have passed since the International Court of Justice rendered its Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of the illegal separation wall in the Palestinian territories. The construction of the unlawful separation wall is not only an illegal act with dire consequences for the Palestinian people, but is also a clear indication of the aggressive, racist and expansionist policies adopted and pursued by the Israeli regime. Despite the unambiguous opposition of the international community to the construction of the illegal wall, the Israeli regime has continued and even expanded the construction of the wall with full impunity. It has indeed added to the suffering and difficult plight of the Palestinian people, who, at the same time, have been suffering and continue to suffer from other Israeli atrocities, such as appalling massacres, extrajudicial killings, home demolitions and other atrocious crimes.

Instead of heeding the international community's calls to terminate such illegal acts, the said regime has continued the construction of the wall, entailing, inter alia, violations of the freedom of movement of the Palestinian people and of their rights to work, worship, health care, education and adequate living standards. It has also forced the eviction of Palestinian civilians from their homes and lands, which has in turn shattered many families.

The international community must hold the Israeli regime accountable for its illegal and criminal actions in the occupied Palestinian territories. As the International Court of Justice also demanded in its Advisory Opinion, that regime must terminate its breaches of international law, cease forthwith the construction of the wall, immediately dismantle the structure, repeal and render ineffective forthwith all legislative and regulatory acts relating thereto, and make reparations for all the damages that the apartheid wall has caused.

In violation of numerous United Nations resolutions and despite repeated calls made by various United Nations organs and agencies, the construction of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories has continued and expanded. That serves as yet another indication that the Israeli regime's words about peace with the Palestinians are deceitful and of no validity. It was unfortunate that certain members permanently seated in the Security Council, by threatening to use their veto, did not allow to proceed the initiative of the Arab Group to submit a draft resolution to the Council condemning that illegal act. The Council should fulfil its Charter-based mandate by taking action against the Israeli regime to compel it immediately to cease all its settlement activities and to dismantle the settlement outposts.

We commend the people of Lebanon for their efforts to bring about national unity and reconciliation. We welcome the election of Mr. Michel Sleiman as President of Lebanon and the formation of a national unity Government. Together with others in the region, we have spared no efforts to encourage all the Lebanese and to help them make these remarkable achievements possible.

While the Israeli war machine is relentlessly at work shattering the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians, the Israeli regime persists in its aggressive policies towards Lebanon — and against others in the region too. It continues to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights and parts of Lebanese territory. That regime is also violating Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), particularly through violations of Lebanese airspace. According to paragraph 10 of the most recent report of the Secretary General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2008/425), Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace have increased to an "unprecedented" level. This is another example of the Israeli regime's contempt for the Security Council and for its decisions.

The Security Council, as the organ of the United Nations with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, should live up to its responsibilities by preventing the Israeli regime from continuing to commit these atrocities and flout the will of the international community, as embodied in numerous United Nations resolutions. Regrettably, the Council has thus far failed to take any serious and tangible action in this regard due to the unconditional support extended to the Israeli regime by a permanent member of the Council. That support cannot but be regarded as explicit support for the war crimes and unlawful activities persistently pursued by the Israeli regime.

The representative of the Israeli regime made some baseless and unworthy allegations and distortions against my country during today's meeting. I wish to place on record that my delegation rejects those absurd allegations and distortions. No one needs to be reminded that these are tired and well-known practices by that regime and its representatives, intended to distract the international community's attention from the horrendous crimes committed by the Israeli regime on a daily basis against the people under its occupation. Nor does anyone need to be reminded — including, let there be no illusion, the representative of the Israeli regime as well — that that regime has inflicted upon mankind only bloodshed, State terrorism, aggression, occupation and crimes against humanity. There is no doubt that the regime's wicked behaviour and policies, coupled with its clandestine nuclear arsenal, have made it the most serious and immediate threat that the civilized world is facing today.

Before concluding, I wish to draw attention to the issue of the Iranian diplomats and the Iranian journalist who were abducted 26 years ago this month by an Israeli-sponsored paramilitary group in Lebanon during the Israeli occupation of that country. As we have already communicated through the Secretary-General, on 5 July 1982, during the invasion of Lebanon and the occupation of Beirut by the Israeli regime, three members of the staff of the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Beirut, as well as an Iranian journalist, were abducted in Lebanon while returning in a diplomatic vehicle from Syria to the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in west Beirut. There are various news reports and numerous signs indicating clearly that those Iranian officials were immediately handed over to the Israeli military forces after their abduction, as Beirut was occupied by the Israeli forces at the time. The reports further indicate that the abducted Iranian officials were subsequently taken to Israeli prisons and since then have been held in captivity by the Israeli regime. This illegal and inhumane act runs against the most fundamental international rules and principles, and also contravenes numerous United Nations resolutions.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is of the strong view that the Israeli regime is responsible for those abductions and for the fate of the Iranian diplomats and the journalist. We call on the Security Council to take appropriate action to help secure their release and their safe return home many years after their illegal abduction and detention.

The President: There are no further speakers on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.

United Nations

S/PV.5941

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5941st meeting

Wednesday, 23 July 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Le Luong Minh	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Du Xiacong
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Trambajolo
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Ms. Qwabe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad

Agenda

Letter dated 22 November 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/920)

> Report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/454)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 22 November 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/920)

Report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process (S/2008/454)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Nepal, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Acharya (Nepal) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/472, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/2008/454, containing the report of the Secretary-General on the request of Nepal for United Nations assistance in support of its peace process.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam.

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1825 (2008).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.5942

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5942nd meeting

Wednesday, 23 July 2008, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Le Luong Minh	(Viet Nam)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Du Xiacong
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Trambajolo
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia (S/2008/466)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-43530 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia (S/2008/466)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Somalia in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Jengeli (Somalia) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Ali Ahmed Jama Jengeli, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Ould Abdallah to take a seat at the Council table.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the Permanent Representative of South Africa requesting that the Security Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Ramtame Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Lamamra to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia, document S/2008/466.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Ould Abdallah: This is my third presentation to the Security Council since taking office more than nine months ago. During my first presentation, on 17 December 2007 (see S/PV.5805), I proposed three options to the Council to address the Somali crisis. The first option was to continue business as usual, with massive assistance, including humanitarian aid, as we have done for the past 18 years. During the past 10 years, the official amount of assistance given to Somalia has been in the vicinity of $6 billion to $8 billion. That approach has helped to save millions of lives and should be commended and pursued. However, its side effects cannot be ignored, and it cannot be expected to bring lasting peace. Today, more than 3 million Somalis live in exile and more than 800,000 are displaced, and the violence continues.

The second option was to withdraw from a country where we have yet to make a significant difference. I know that it is difficult. Therefore, I advanced a third approach to try something different: simultaneous political and security action.

The Transitional Federal Government, the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) and civil society organizations agreed, at the invitation of the United Nations, to attend the Djibouti talks, which were designed to bring Somalis together to end almost two decades of violence. On 9 June 2008, the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government and the ARS, which was considered extremist while in power in Mogadishu in 2006, signed the Djibouti agreement. Members of both groups are now here in this Chamber as representatives of a future stable Somalia. The Djibouti agreement was witnessed by a number of observer States and international organizations, including France, the United Kingdom, the United States, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the European Union, as well as by the host countries and representatives of Governments accredited to Somalia.

The working visit of the Security Council to Djibouti at the opening of the discussions was one of the most important contributions to the successful conclusion of the Djibouti agreement. The Council delegation, led by the Permanent Representatives of the United Kingdom and South Africa, made a decisive impact on the negotiations and on participants and observers during the two-day-long exchange with Somali representatives. I am grateful to the Security Council, and so are the Somalis. Everyone called on them to come up with a peace agreement, and the Somalis successfully delivered on that. They deserve the full support of the international community.

In all peace processes, some individuals or groups always begin by rejecting agreements. Effective implementation of the agreement should be an incentive to bring more Somalis on board and to give them a chance to contribute to the rebirth of their country. In that context, I would like to propose that the Council make a strong public expression of its support for the Djibouti agreement and call on Member States to give it a chance to be implemented rapidly. For their part, the Somalis have started working together, and today the ball is in the court of the international community. We need to act quickly.

The agreement will not bring peace overnight — no agreement has ever done so — especially if spoilers and freelance mediators, as I stated to the Council in my presentation last December, continue meddling. For a long time, violence has been pervasive in Somalia, and it will continue for a while. However, the agreement provides an opportunity to marginalize and eventually stop such violence. At the same time, a review of those on the Security Council sanctions list should help to recognize the role of those individuals who have decided to change their behaviour and to support peace.

Our priority should be to stay the course and follow through on the implementation of the Djibouti agreement. Such a development should provide security for humanitarian programmes — in particular, naval escorts for the World Food Programme, which brings 80 per cent of its food aid to Somalia by sea. Unfortunately, those vital escorts — initiated by France and then conducted by Denmark and the Netherlands — have recently ceased. I sympathize with the Somali nationals who constitute more than 95 per cent of aid workers in south and central Somalia. They risk their lives daily and have, all too often, been the innocent victims of targeted killings. With international determination, as shown in Kosovo and elsewhere, the individuals carrying out these terrible deeds should not be given a chance to prevail.

The international community must unite and show solidarity with the Somali people. It would be a terrible mistake to allow certain individuals to gamble with the future of Somalia and the entire Horn of Africa. Violence can easily spread across international borders. The continued neglect of Somalia poses a threat to international peace.

Today, our choices for bringing peace to Somalia are limited, but the time has come to make a final decision. The African Union Mission in Somalia has been doing an excellent job under extremely difficult conditions. The Council could consider re-hatting that force if that could provide the needed capabilities. Another option would be an international stabilization force, as indicated in the Secretary-General's letter of 20 September 2007 to the President of the Security Council (S/2007/762), who at that time was the representative of France. A third credible possibility for the Security Council would be the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping force. Given that the Somalis have suffered for so long, and given the current favourable political context following the Djibouti agreement, it seems to me that it is time for the Security Council to take bold, decisive and fast action.

The President: I thank Mr. Ould Abdallah for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union.

Mr. Lamamra: I would like first to warmly congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the high office of President of the Security Council, and I equally congratulate and thank your predecessor for a job well done.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the Council on the subject of Somalia, and I wish to commend you, Sir, on your initiative to organize this meeting, which we believe will boost the renewed momentum we are witnessing in the mobilization of world attention. Allow me also to restate our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for his commitment and support and to commend his Special Representative, our colleague and friend Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, for his relentless efforts on the ground.

The presence in the Council today of an integrated Somali delegation led by the Foreign Minister of the Transitional Federal Government, and including some leaders of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, is a very positive and strong indicator of their willingness to work towards the restoration of lasting peace and reconciliation in their country. It is also a clear message that should reassure the Security Council and the international community that Somalia is ready to receive and to lend its full cooperation to a United Nations peacekeeping mission. We urge the Council to fully take into account the implications of this very important act of unity aimed at achieving peace and security in Somalia and the region as a whole.

We note with satisfaction the growing mobilization with regard to the situation in Somalia as recognition of the window of opportunity created following the progress made by the Somalis themselves, in particular the efforts of the Transitional Federal Government and other stakeholders, towards the stabilization of the situation in their country and in furtherance of dialogue and reconciliation among all Somalis.

Those efforts culminated, first, in the convening of the National Reconciliation Congress in July and August 2007, which made a number of recommendations aimed at promoting an all-inclusive political process. That was further reinforced by the efforts of Special Representative Ould Abdallah and supported by the African Union through the convening of the intra-Somalia talks, which resulted in the Djibouti agreement of 9 June 2008 between the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia.

As the Council is aware, during its meeting held at the level of heads of State and Government on the margins of the most recent summit of the African Union, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, the Peace and Security Council welcomed the new prospects for lasting peace and reconciliation in Somalia and called for support and cooperation for the implementation of the Djibouti agreement. We are pleased to note that other leaders and elements of the opposition in Somalia are recognizing and joining the agreement as a viable means towards finding a lasting solution to their differences. The agreement indeed provides for the establishment of two key committees — a joint security committee and a high-level committee — to both prepare for the consolidation of the ongoing political process and considerably to improve the security situation in the country. The implementation of that provision is currently under way, and the African Union is actively collaborating with the United Nations Special Representative in implementing it and other important elements of the agreement.

I would like to underscore the fact that the resolve of the Somali parties to commit themselves to key proposals, including the restoration of mutual trust and confidence, with the objective of ending the conflict, provides the appropriate opportunity for the international community, in particular the United Nations and the African Union, to further assist in the peace process. The African Union, which is currently on the ground through the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other good offices of the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission, is prepared to use all necessary means within its capacity to assist the parties, in collaboration with the United Nations and other members of the international community, towards an effective cessation of hostilities on the ground.

Despite all the sacrifices of its leaders and elements, AMISOM is unable to fulfil its mandate because its strength is obviously grossly incommensurate with the scope of the real challenges on the ground. The Mission faces a severe lack of funding and logistical support. According to United Nations one-year standard estimates, its budget amounts to more than $800,000 for its logistics and financial and technical components. It is therefore crucial to beef up the Mission in order for it to reach its authorized strength of 8,000 troops, from the current level of 2,600, which constitutes only about 30 per cent of its total authorized strength.

In that regard, the African Union is embarking on a new troop-generation exercise amongst its members, and I wish to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the Governments of Burundi and Uganda for their continued commitment to the realization of lasting peace and reconciliation among all Somalis. I would also like to reiterate the request of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union for assistance for the Mission. While acknowledging the response of the Secretary-General to that request, I should like to reiterate our call for greater support for AMISOM from all other partners.

I wish at this juncture to draw the attention of the Council to developments on the ground, which offer a window of opportunity that is without precedent in the past 18 years. I therefore wish to renew the previous calls of the African Union for a United Nations takeover of AMISOM, a development that is also clearly wished for by the Somalis themselves as expressed in the Djibouti agreement, in order to achieve an accelerated end to the ongoing hostilities. In any case, AMISOM stands ready to be ultimately included in the international stabilization force provided for in the Djibouti agreement.

In my interaction with the Security Council delegation during its visit to Djibouti, I had the opportunity to suggest for further consideration the need for a strong naval component in the design of the concept of operations for the United Nations peacekeeping mission for Somalia, particularly at the early stages of the mission. That suggestion is informed by experience on the ground thus far. A mission with a strong naval component would also be a significant safeguard against ground attacks on the mission and would thus enhance the security of both the personnel of the mission and its equipment. Improved security at the maritime borders of Somalia would in turn spread a positive multiplier effect inwards to the rest of the country. That would be one way by which the security process would impact the political and humanitarian efforts, as has been recommended by Special Representative Ould Abdallah, whose focus on the need for the international community to act decisively and to act now I fully share.

Notwithstanding the difficult history of the past involvement of the United Nations in Somalia, we call on the Security Council to crown its consideration of the situation at this crucial stage with a resolution enabling the United Nations and the international community to deploy a robust mission and thus fully seize the current opportunity for the restoration of lasting peace and security in the country. We are all aware that any unnecessary delays may give room to spoilers to undermine our efforts and turn this auspicious occasion to build a better future for Somalia and the region into a lost opportunity. We must not — the Council must not — allow that to happen.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Ahmed Jama Jengeli, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia.

Mr. Jengeli (Somalia): It is my pleasure to participate in this Security Council discussion on the situation in Somalia. In that connection, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting. We would like also to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for their dedication and tireless efforts for peace and stability in Somalia. Similarly, we also want to thank the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for their efforts.

The Security Council was first seized of the situation in Somalia in early 1992. Since then, there have been meetings, reports and fact-finding missions on Somalia. Today, it is not my intention to repeat the resolutions and deliberations of the past. However, by way of emphasis, I would like to concentrate on two important issues, namely, the security and reconciliation aspect and the humanitarian situation.

With regard to the issue of security and reconciliation, I would like to refer, as my learned friends who spoke earlier did, to the recent meeting which took place in Djibouti between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the opposition Alliance (ARS). As the Council is aware, and with its support and encouragement, a peace and reconciliation agreement has been reached and initialled by the TFG and the opposition Alliance. As envisaged, the agreement will be duly signed by the TFG and the Alliance in Saudi Arabia very soon. Both the Transitional Federal Parliament of Somalia and the Central Committee of the ARS have endorsed the agreement. Once the agreement is signed we will proceed to its implementation, and the various committees, especially the security and political committees, will be expected to function.

In the meantime, we are in a period of consolidation and expansion. Both parties have embarked on widening awareness of the agreement so that all stakeholders and civil society are informed and enabled to give full backing to its implementation when it goes into effect.

We wish to stress that the TFG is fully committed to implementing its obligations under the agreement. We also expect the opposition Alliance to demonstrate genuine commitment to the implementation of the agreement, and indeed we are hopeful in this respect.

In this context, we hope that we are all in agreement that if the Security Council authorizes the deployment of a United Nations international stabilization force without delay, we will have ample reason to believe that the 17-year agony of the Somali people will draw to an end and that the world will be a better and more peaceful place.

We wish to point out here that, in our view, a force of around 26,000 personnel to stabilize Somalia, envisaged under a previous report, may not be necessary or feasible. Rather, we believe that a much smaller force under a United Nations mandate and with United Nations funding could do a good job under reasonable circumstances. Moreover, we believe that the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) force that is already deployed in Somalia should be the nucleus of any future United Nations international stabilization force or peacekeeping force.

But, in the end, the Security Council may wish to decide on the actual size of any agreed force. We want to be on record in reiterating our resolve to do all we can to provide a climate conducive to the deployment and proper functioning of a stabilization force.

I would now like to turn to the issue of humanitarian assistance. Based on the information that we have, a substantial amount of assistance is required in the coming months. But we recognize, at the outset, that there is a very close linkage between security and reconciliation and humanitarian needs. An improvement in the security situation will definitely have a positive impact on the humanitarian situation and vice versa.

Therefore, the strategic direction of our future efforts should focus on the political and security fronts so that a more stable and secure environment is created for emergency humanitarian and other operations. Moreover, the window of opportunity that currently exists on the political front should be taken advantage of in order to save millions of Somalis from the utter devastation of conflict, drought and other man-made and natural calamities.

In this respect, I would like to reiterate our sadness and sorrow at the deliberate killings and abductions of humanitarian workers, who are doing heroic work under difficult and demanding conditions. Our Government and people will, as a matter of priority, pursue these criminal elements so as to bring them to justice.

I wish to appeal to the Security Council to address in a forthright and urgent manner the issue of impunity for crimes committed against the Somali people. Indeed, the Somali people are grateful for the tentative steps that the Council have already taken in that direction. But much more needs to be done in this regard.

In conclusion, we have good reason to be positive and optimistic about the future of Somalia. A lot depends on the people of Somalia and their leaders. Also, a lot depends on the quality, relevance, quantity and timeliness of the assistance provided by the Security Council and the international community. We very much hope that the idea of an adequate United Nations stabilization force will receive a major push forward at this meeting of the Security Council.

We very much look forward to the day when we can secure stability and peace in Somalia so that the major task of rehabilitating, reconstructing and developing Somalia can begin in earnest. Indeed, the decisions that will be made here in the coming weeks will have a profound impact on that becoming a reality.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I would like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the matter.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.

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Security Council

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Official communiqué of the 5943rd (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 24 July 2008, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

> "On 24 July 2008, the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 1353 (2001), annex II, sections A and B, held its 5943rd meeting in private with the troop-contributing countries to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire.
>
> "The Security Council and the troop-contributing countries heard a briefing under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure by Mr. Choi Young-Jin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire.
>
> "Members of the Council, Mr. Choi and representatives of participating troop-contributing countries had an exchange of views."